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**Supported Employment:
Persons with Learning Difficulties in Malaysia**

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Employment Research

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Wan Arnidawati Wan Abdullah

February 2013

DECLARATION

This is to declare that:

- I am responsible for the work submitted in this thesis.
- This work has been written by the author.
- All verbatim extracts have been distinguished and the sources have been specifically acknowledged.
- During the preparation of this thesis a number of papers were prepared. The remaining parts of the thesis are unpublished.

Doctoral Colloquium presentations:

2011. "How far have they come? Learning difficulties and integrated employment in Malaysia". Postgraduate Disability Research: Interdisciplinary Disability Research Conference. 13th July 2011. University of Warwick, Coventry, United Kingdom.

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2011. Integrated employment in Malaysia: From the lenses of employees with learning difficulties. Disability and the Majority World: Towards a Global Disability Studies- the 1st Annual International Conference. 7-8th July 2011. Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, United Kingdom.

2011. Adults with learning difficulties and integrated employment: the case of Malaysia. International Conference on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. 18-20th July 2011. Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia.

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Supported Employment: Persons with Learning Difficulties in Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Many studies in the minority world have emphasized the potentially positive influences of supported as opposed to sheltered employment on the inclusion of persons with disabilities, including learning difficulties, into the mainstream economy and community. In 2007, Malaysia, as one of the developing countries which possesses a growing population of persons with learning difficulties, started to promote this form of employment hoping for similar outcomes. However, in the majority world where a country is designing policy for the first time and is at the relatively early stages of implementation, there has been little research to explore supported employment practices for persons with learning difficulties and offer empirical findings from real employment experiences. Thus, this thesis aims to fill this gap through providing some substantial evidence and new insights.

The social theory of disability and the debates around it have been particularly influential in the past three decades. These have helped to shape the approach of this research into understanding the experiences of persons with learning difficulties in the labour market in Malaysia. The study also covers the general understanding of disability from an Islamic perspective. Theoretical approaches to career and career development are also discussed before specifically focusing on the barriers faced in accessing a working life and developing a career in paid jobs as well as achieving greater social integration.

The empirical contribution of the thesis is through a study of supported employment initiated in Malaysia to enable persons with learning difficulties to work in the mainstream retail sector, and sets that experience in the context of relevant policy and practice. It aims to produce key insights into the 'lived realities' of employees with learning difficulties taking part in the scheme. It foregrounds their perceptions but also explores the viewpoints of government officials, managers and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) coordinators involved in the development of policy and practice relating to the scheme. The research participants were drawn from the 82 employees with learning difficulties engaged in the supported employment scheme in a retail company, together with seven managers involved with the scheme, eight government officials and three NGOs coordinators.

One finding of the study is that, in general, supported employment is likely to help to reduce the stigma associated with having a disability. However, while most persons with learning difficulties believe themselves to have the ability to work in supported employment, others, including those who are providing support for their entry to the workforce, still have doubts. Notwithstanding

enjoying many aspects of their working lives in supported employment, some employees face difficulties in developing interpersonal relationships in the workplace and achieving much better control of their own lives than is often assumed to result from having a job.

The findings also suggest that stability in the political, economic and social environment facilitate the development of better policy in this complex area. Commitment from the company is vitally important to guarantee the success of the scheme. The existence of international policy frameworks are also helpful and cross-country collaboration has been tremendously beneficial, in particular that between Malaysian institutions and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

Further development of policy and practice is required, especially in enriching the understanding of disability issues among most government officials, managers and NGOs coordinators, taking greater account of the research evidence that points to the limited awareness of and specific knowledge about disability issues, particularly for persons with learning difficulties and their employability. The voices and views of persons with learning difficulties should also be better acknowledged in setting priorities for disability-related reform. Finally, in order to sustain and develop supported employment more effectively, there is a fundamental need to upgrade the education and training system for this group as well as to intensify collaboration between government departments.

Keywords: supported employment, disability, persons with learning difficulties, Malaysia

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADHD	: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
CBR	: Community Based Rehabilitation
DPOs	: Disabled Persons Organisations
DPwDD	: Development for Persons with Disabilities Department
EIP	: Early Intervention Programme
EPC	: Disabled Employees Monthly Allowance
EPU	: Economic Planning Unit
GDP	: Gross Domestic Product
HRDF	: Human Resource Development Fund
IEP	: Individual Education Plan
ILO	: International Labour Organisation
IPS	: Individual Placement Support
JICA	: Japan International Cooperation Agency
KFC	: Kentucky Fried Chicken
LD	: Labour Department
MASCO 2005	: Malaysian Standard Classification of Occupation 2005
MCD	: Malaysian Confederation of the Disabled
MoDFC	: Ministry of Development for Women, Families and Communities
MoE	: Ministry of Education
MoH	: Ministry of Health
MoHR	: Ministry of Human Resources
MoU	: Memorandum of Understanding

- NGOs : Non-governmental organisations
- OKU : *Orang Kurang Upaya* (Persons with Disabilities)
- PKIK Kajang : *Pertubuhan Kanak-kanak Istimewa Kajang* (Organisation for Special Child, Kajang)
- PWDA 2008 : Persons with Disabilities Act, 2008
- RAG : Research Advisory Group
- SED : Special Education Division
- SEP : Special Education Programme
- SK : *Sekolah Kebangsaan* (Primary school)
- SJK : *Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan*
- SPM : *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (Malaysia Certificate of Education)
- SPOKU : *Sistem Pendaftaran dan Penempatan OKU* (Registration and Placement System for Persons with Disabilities)
- STPM : *Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia* (High School Certificate)
- SPSS 17 : Statistical Package for Social Sciences Version 17
- SWD : Social Welfare Department
- PLPP Bangi : *Pusat Latihan Perindustrian dan Pemulihan Bangi* (The Bangi Industrial and Rehabilitation Centre)
- PMR : *Penilaian Menengah Rendah* (Lower Certificate of Education)
- UBL 1984 : Uniform Building By-Laws of 1984
- UN : United Nations
- UNCRPD : United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- UPIAS : The Union of the Physically Impaired against Segregation

- UPSR : *Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah* (Primary School Assessment Test)
- UV : United Voice
- WHO : World Health Organisation
- 2OE : Open Entry Open Exit

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

This study is concerned with supported employment for people with learning difficulties in Malaysia. It focuses on the experiences and perspectives of key individuals and groups involved in a recent initiative designed to enable people with learning disabilities to work in the mainstream retail sector, and sets that experience in the context of relevant policy and practice.

This chapter presents a rationale for the study and outlines its key elements. Research objectives and research questions are briefly outlined. Key terms in relation to persons with disabilities and persons with learning difficulties used throughout the study are also clarified. Finally, the structure of the thesis is briefly described.

Labour market participation is often seen as having a crucial contribution to enable persons with disabilities to achieve both greater independence and greater inclusion in society (Ernst & Berg, 2009). However, their aspirations to be actively participating in open employment and to become economically self-reliant as well as contributing towards national economic development are severely hampered by the multitude of barriers they face (Barnes *et al.*, 1999; Migliore *et al.*, 2008). Inaccessible employment infrastructure, inadequate skills and qualifications as well as widespread doubts by others about the capacities of persons with disabilities to cope with paid work are

widely believed to be significant obstacles which have restricted their employment opportunities (Jayasooria *et al.*, 1997; Jones, 2008).

The evidence from a range of countries suggests that there is a crisis of joblessness among persons with disabilities. Moreover, it is worst for those with learning difficulties, most of whom are confined to forms of sheltered employment or other activity or staying at home (Brown *et al.*, 2006; Wehman, 2006). There is lack of opportunity for them to be in mainstream employment due to a combination of their intellectual characteristics, the assumptions made by others and the lack of education and training provided for them (Burge *et al.*, 2007; Migliore *et al.*, 2008; Yeo, 2007).

The challenges faced by persons with learning difficulties in accessing the labour market have resulted in the development of the concept and practice of *supported employment* which upholds the ability to have a real job in the community together with non-disabled people, earn reasonable salaries and receive individualised, on-going support services to maintain them in employment (Department of Health, 2009; Reid & Bray, 1998; Wilson, 2003).

Many studies in the minority world have claimed that supported employment has a significant influence on improving the inclusion of persons with learning difficulties in both the economy and the community (Bass *et al.*, 1996; Drake *et al.*, 1994). This has influenced policymakers in some countries in the majority world to hope for and pursue the same outcomes. However, most research has been undertaken in the minority world and this calls into question whether it has relevance to the lived experience of people in the

majority world, particularly when the importance of local structures and cultural traditions of the society are acknowledged.

In Malaysia, supported employment for persons with learning difficulties was introduced in 2007 (Social Welfare Department Malaysia, 2009) which is almost 20 years after its inception in the United States (Disability Information Services, 2002; Wehman & Revell, 1996). Since supported employment is a new approach in Malaysia, very little is known about the current supported employment scheme provided for persons with learning difficulties in the Malaysian context. Furthermore, more generally, as most disability research is from the medical and educational perspectives, there is very little research relating to Malaysia about persons with learning difficulties or their engagement with work of different kinds.

1.2 RATIONALE FOR CARRYING OUT THE RESEARCH

This investigation is partly motivated by the fact that Malaysia is in a process of redefining its policies towards eradicating discrimination generally against persons with disabilities and to move towards their having equal opportunities to participate in the labour market. As it was adopting the guidelines from the Biwako Millenium Framework (BMF)¹ and United Nations (UN)² conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Government in Malaysia recognised the need to develop policies to support

¹ Biwako Millenium Framework towards an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for persons with disabilities in Asia and the Pacific, 2002

² United Nation Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006, Article 27

equal opportunities for persons with disabilities. Introducing a supported employment scheme is one of the efforts to fulfil the responsibilities placed on states who are parties to the conventions. Hence policy has so far been underpinned by the conception of equal opportunities for persons with disabilities in these conventions which reflects a social model of disability.

Given that Malaysia is a developing country in the early stages of attempting to create equal opportunities for persons with disabilities and given that it has recently started the supported employment scheme, it would appear crucial to undertake research on the development and implementation of this new initiative. This thesis attempts to contribute critically to the existing knowledge in this area, to broaden the theoretical approach to be sufficiently relevant to a less economically developed country such as Malaysia, and to provide evidence of the experience of persons with learning difficulties in supported employment in the majority world. It is hoped that any increased understanding derived from the thesis may eventually contribute to the Malaysian Government's efforts both to extend and improve the economic rights of persons with learning difficulties and to increase their participation in the labour market.

The aim then should be to provide an in-depth understanding of persons with learning difficulties and their participation in supported employment, in order to further contribute towards meeting the challenge of including persons with learning difficulties in the socio-economic mainstream.

1.3 THE KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Accordingly, this study seeks to add to the knowledge of the development, implementation and outcomes of supported employment for persons with learning difficulties in Malaysia by investigating the experiences of supported participants in the workplace, together with those actively involved in providing employment support for this group.

The study aims to answer the following broad research questions:

1. To what extent are persons with learning difficulties capable of joining supported employment?
2. What are the factors that influence the emergence of supported employment in Malaysia?
3. How has supported employment for persons with learning difficulties been implemented?
4. How has supported employment affected the lives of persons with learning difficulties, socially and economically?

1.4 NOTES ON TERMINOLOGY

1.4.1 Persons with disabilities

A number of writers have commented on the range of terminology used in different countries in relation to people with disabilities (Goodley, 2011). The literature reveals that the terms 'disabled people' and 'persons with disabilities' are used by academics, Governmental and non-Governmental organisations and activists. In the United States, the term 'people with

disabilities' is always used in relation to a person with impairment with the intention of empowering and dignifying someone primarily as a human being which reflects a people-first language (Vaughan, 1997). By contrast, 'disabled people' is the primary term used in the UK which is based on concepts underpinning the social model of disability. In adopting this term, the intention was to emphasise societal factors which disabled people rather than seeing disability as an individual characteristic, issues which will be elaborated in Chapter Three.

In Malaysia, *Orang Kurang Upaya (OKU)* is the term used in the Malaysian national language referring to an individual with impairment. In general, both terms - disabled people and persons with disabilities - are used interchangeably in English translations of the Malay. However, a uniform use of the term 'persons with disabilities' is seen in most policies and provisions relating to this group. Hence, this thesis uses the term 'persons with disabilities' mainly to maintain the consistency with the policies and provisions in Malaysia without ignoring the principle of the social model of disability in the term 'disabled people'. However, 'disabled people' is also used where appropriate especially when indicating disabled people's organisations or movements.

1.4.2 Persons with learning difficulties

It has been noted in the literature that the concept of 'learning difficulties' is relatively complicated to define and there are many different definitions currently in use. The use of terms apparently equivalent to 'learning

difficulties' also varies and references are made to 'learning disabilities' or 'intellectual disabilities' or 'intellectual impairment' or 'significant disabilities' or 'mental retardation' by authors in different countries (see Bernal *et al.*, 2005; Goodley, 2011; MacIntyre, 2009; Noonan Walsh, 2000; Parmenter, 2010).

In discussing what is meant by learning disabilities, the UK White Paper 'Valuing People' suggests the term:

"... includes a significantly reduced ability to understand new or complex information, to learn new skills (impaired intelligence), with a reduced ability to cope independently (impaired social functioning) which started before adulthood, with a lasting effect on development." (Department of Health, 2001:14)

Some of the more medicalised definitions continue to incorporate measurements based on psychometric testing. Other definitions take a more functional approach, focusing on areas of difficulty in comparison to the general population. According to Diesfield,

"'Learning disability' is not an absolute term but a socially relative one and it reflects an expectation of those mental capacities which are required for 'normal functioning' in society. Therefore, labelling people as 'handicapped' is an indicator of what can be tolerated in mainstream settings." (Diesfield, 1999:23)

The decision was made to use the term 'learning difficulties' throughout the thesis as preferred by some disability writers (see for example, Chappell, 1998; Chappell *et al.*, 2001) who regarded 'learning difficulties' as having less negative connotations. Moreover, this term was also preferred by many self-advocacy movements (Goodley, 2000) since it infers that people want to learn and be taught how to do things and have a wide range and variation in current and future abilities to learn (Dumbleton, 2009). In addition, the term

'learning difficulty' has been adopted here in order to maintain consistency with majority of policy documents and service provision within Malaysia.

In Malaysia, there is no generally used definition of 'learning difficulties' *per se* other than categories of learning difficulties within the purview of the Ministry of Education Malaysia (Education Act 1996 (Act 550) & Selected Regulations 2008, 2008) which includes those identified as having Down syndrome, mild autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), minimal mental retardation and specific learning disabilities (*i.e.* dyslexia (difficulties in reading), dyscalculia (difficulties in mathematics), dysgraphia (difficulties in writing) and dyspraxia (difficulties in motor skills)).

The operational definition for 'learning difficulties' in this study conforms to the definition used by the Malaysian Government as mentioned above.

However, it will only focus on those within the Government definition of very mild, mild, moderate and severe described as being able to join labour workforce provided with suitable assistance and support (see Yeo, 2007).

1.5 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

In order to set the scene for the study, following this chapter, Chapter 2 begins by describing key aspects of the circumstances of persons with disabilities, particularly those with learning difficulties, in Malaysia. Policies relevant to this group in the field of education, welfare, training and employment are outlined.

Chapters 3 and 4 review the existing research literature dealing with disability and employment. Chapter 3 considers ways of theorising disability beginning with an exploration of the individual and social models of disability and then examining subsequent perspectives developed within the field of Disability Studies. Consideration is given to which perspectives offer a useful way of understanding the experiences of persons with learning difficulties in the labour market.

Chapter 4 turns to research on the experiences of disabled people in the labour market, including those with learning difficulties. It explores the substantial body of research that has been conducted on the barriers experienced by persons with learning difficulties in getting 'real' jobs and their experiences in joining the labour market.

Against the above background, Chapter 5 relates the research questions identified in this Introduction to the forms of evidence required to address them and discusses the choices of research methodology appropriate to the study. It starts by describing the debates in disability studies that influenced the development of the research paradigms. It then goes on to outline the research design and process of data collection and data analysis before finally offering a critical reflection on the trustworthiness of the whole process.

Chapters 6 to 10 give the empirical findings of the thesis. Chapter 6 presents the quantitative part of the study and focuses primarily on the findings of the survey conducted with employees with learning difficulties participating in the

supported employment scheme. The chapter analyses their responses so as to capture their broad experiences and perceptions of supported employment. Chapter 7 pursues a more nuanced approach to corresponding themes through the findings of the qualitative element of the study based on a series of group interviews involving employees with learning difficulties.

Chapters 8, 9 and 10 shift the focus from the experiences and perceptions of employees to those of key actors engaged in the policy and practitioner communities involved in the operation of supported employment: civil servants, managers and coordinators of NGOs, respectively.

While Chapters 6 to 10 concentrate on the separate elements of evidence produced for this thesis, Chapter 11 seeks to bring them together in addressing each of the main research questions. This not only looks for a coherent understanding of the stage of development of supported employment in Malaysia but also aims to identify any uncertainties, inconsistencies, misunderstandings and gaps in knowledge relating to the scheme.

Finally, Chapter 12 summarises the key conclusions of the research about supported employment and draws out its implications for both the development of policy and practice and the directions for future research. It highlights some of the main insights for the persons with learning difficulties themselves, as well as policy makers and service providers.

CHAPTER 2

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES - THE MALAYSIAN CONTEXT

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This research is concerned with supported employment for persons with disabilities in Malaysia focusing specifically on the experience of persons with learning difficulties in this scheme of employment. Since the research was conducted mainly in Malaysia, it is important to have an understanding about the Malaysian context in order to conduct a balanced analysis and interpretation of this employment scheme. Hence, this chapter briefly outlines some of the basic relevant information on Malaysia and disability issues in the country. Key areas of disability policy development and trends will be highlighted along with the disability related legislation and provisions.

2.2 PROFILE OF MALAYSIA

Malaysia is a small country in South East Asia surrounded by Thailand, Singapore, Brunei and Indonesia. Malaysia is separated by the South China Sea into two regions, Peninsular Malaysia and Malaysian Borneo, also known as West and East Malaysia. The country consists of 13 states and 3 federal territories. The capital city of Malaysia is Kuala Lumpur while Putrajaya is the federal Government administrative centre.

According to the 2010 Census (Jabatan Perangkaan Malaysia, 2010), the Malaysian population consisted of more than 28.3 million people, of whom 5.2 million live in East Malaysia and 22.5 million live in Peninsular Malaysia.

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural country. The ethnic groups comprises of two main categories; Bumiputera and non-Bumiputera groups. The dominant Bumiputera are the Malays (51 per cent) and the minority of non-Malay indigenous people (12 per cent). The non-Bumiputera group include Chinese (27 per cent), Indian (eight per cent) and other ethnic origins (two per cent). Islam is the official religion and 60 per cent of the population are Muslims. Other religious groups are Buddhists (19 per cent), Christians (nine per cent), Hindus (six per cent) and smaller groups of Confucians or Taoist (three per cent).

The official language is Malay and various Malay dialects or tribal languages are also spoken. The Chinese population speaks Hokkien, Cantonese and Chinese languages while the Indian speaks a variety of Dravidian and Indo-European languages, predominantly Tamil. However, in business and administration, English and Chinese are also widely used.

According to the Statistics Department (Jabatan Perangkaan Malaysia, 2010), Malaysia's GDP grew at an average of about five per cent during the last decade or so. The labour force participation rate was 65 per cent with a total of 12.4 million employed. The unemployment rate was 3.1 per cent as at December 2011 (The World Bank, 2013). Despite the numerous employment opportunities, discrimination on the grounds of ethnic origin or disability or both was reported by Aeberhard-Hodges and Raskin (1997), though the available evidence on this issue, was acknowledged to be limited. In addition, with the rise in labour intensive industries, there is an increase of

migrant workers, especially from Indonesia, Bangladesh and the Philippines who are mostly employed in basic skills jobs such as manual labourer or domestic helpers.

2.3 DISABILITY IN MALAYSIA

It has been argued that the official data on the prevalence of disability in Malaysia underestimate the numbers of persons with disabilities in the population (Siti Zakiah Bt. Muhamad Isa, 2003). If the World Health Organisation's (WHO) disability prevalence estimate of 5 to 10 per cent is applied (Shakespeare & Officer, 2011), this should give a population in Malaysia of between 1.4 to 2.8 million persons with disabilities. However, in 2010, the registered number of persons with disabilities with the Development for Persons with Disabilities Department (DPwDD), based on voluntary registration, is recorded to be only 314,247 people (Social Welfare Department Malaysia, 2011a). The number registered slightly exceeds the Malaysian Government's official estimate of 283,341 persons with disabilities based on a rate of one per cent in the population.

In terms of services provided for persons with disabilities, in general, DPwDD under the Ministry of Development for Women, Families and Communities (MoDWFC) is the lead Government department for the welfare of this group. However, other ministries have specific responsibilities. For instance, matters concerning education are supervised by the Special Education Division (SED) under the Ministry of Education (MoE), employment issues are the responsibility of the Labour Department (LD) under the Ministry of Human

Resources (MoHR) and health issues are under the management of Ministry of Health (MoH).

In Malaysian history, many terminologies were used interchangeably by the Government to describe persons with disabilities such as 'less fortunate', 'special people', 'people with different abilities' and 'less-than-able'. However, 'persons with disabilities' is now used in most policies and provisions relating to the group though terminology and definitions specific to the scope of services of the agencies are also used. DPwDD and MoH, following the WHO definition, for instance, share the same definition of persons with disabilities as:

"Any person unable to ensure by himself wholly or partly, the necessities of a normal individual and/or social life, as a result of deficiency either congenital or not, in his physical or mental capabilities, which may have happened before or after childbirth."
(Social Welfare Department Malaysia, 2009:8)

While for the LD, a person with disability is defined in the Code of Practice for the Employment of Persons with Disabilities in the Private Sector as:

"Individual with physical or mental disabilities either born with the disabilities or acquired through mishaps or sickness but are able to undertake employment"(Ministry of Human Resources, 1999:4)

The SED on the other hand, used the term of 'students with special needs' in referring to persons with disabilities in the Education Act, which defined them as:

"...visually handicapped or partially or fully deaf or suffer from the disability to learn. These are the students that have been identified as suffering from physical-sensory deficiencies and learning disabilities" (Education Act 1996 (Act 550) & Selected Regulations 2008, 2008:12)

Moreover, under the Persons with Disabilities Act (PWDA) 2008, persons with disabilities are defined as:

“...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” (Persons with Disabilities Act, 2008: 9)

From those definitions, it can be seen that the DPwDD, MoH and SED stresses impairments while the LD emphasises the ability to work, using the phrase ‘are able to undertake employment’. In addition, the word ‘long term’ in the definition under PWDA 2008 is not clearly defined (Harlida Abdul Wahab, 2011). It is apparent then, that the term ‘persons with disabilities’ is loosely defined and has no standard definition across the ministries and departments. The range probably both reflects and results in different understanding, approaches and responsibilities.

Across all ministries and Government departments, persons with disabilities are generally classified into eight categories based on their impairment groups. In order to distinguish these categories of impairments, every persons with disabilities who registers with DPwDD is given an identity card with different colour according to their impairments (see Table 2.1). Persons with learning difficulties are the largest population among registered persons with disabilities with 120,109 people (38 per cent) registered with the DPwDD (Social Welfare Department Malaysia, 2011a). Another substantial group is made up of people termed as having physical disabilities with 105,020 people (33 per cent). Despite being the largest group, persons with learning difficulties are recognized to lag behind other groups in terms of education,

training, employment and social development (Social Welfare Department Malaysia, 2011a; Yeo, 2007).

Table 2.1 Categories of disability and registration with DPwDD (as at 2010)

No.	Categories of disability	Number of registration	Card Colour
1	Hearing disability	39,824	Purple
2	Visual disability	27,840	Blue
3	Physical disability	105,020	Green
4	Cerebral Palsy	4,068	Green
5	Learning Difficulty	120,109	Yellow
6	Mental problems	3,663	White
7	Speech problems	334	Brown
8	Multiple/ Others	3,389	Red
TOTAL		314,247	

2.3.1 Developments of policy, the law and provisions for persons with disabilities

Social work among persons with disabilities in Malaysia began to be established in the early 20th century by Christian missionaries. Subsequently, significant changes in provision for persons with disabilities took place, starting with the setting up of the Social Welfare Department (SWD) in 1946. Its stated purpose was to provide *“the care of the crippled, blind and feeble-minded”* (Department of Social Welfare, 1946 in Jayasooria & Ooi, 1994: 97). The primary focus of these services, however, was to encourage the families and communities to take responsibility for persons with disabilities. The approach reflected the Asian culture of collectivism with support for persons with disabilities being viewed as a social responsibility, Malaysian people are expected to show kindness and consideration towards persons with

disabilities and therefore the approaches taken were based on charity and good will.

Civil society- service provision and advocacy

The 1950s to 1970s saw the establishment of some rehabilitation provision. A number of rehabilitation centres were developed including The Jubilee Home in 1953, the Spastics Centre for therapy in 1960, a Cheshire Home for people with physical impairments in 1961 and the Daya Workshop providing employment in 1979. The traditional concept underpinning rehabilitation was that disability was an individual's own problem, which possibly resulted from 'bad karma'. Therefore, services provided for persons with disabilities were aimed to help the individual to become as 'normal' as possible. This concept of disability is equivalent to the medical model which focuses on the individual's impairment and his or her inability to perform certain everyday activities, including work tasks (Oliver, 1990). In addition, the number of voluntary associations and organisations gradually began to grow. Some had the aim of empowering the persons with disabilities and fighting for equal rights. According to Jayasooria and Ooi (1994) an increasing awareness among persons with disabilities began after the early stage of independence in 1957. This happened due to the education some received which raised their consciousness and wish to fight for a better future.

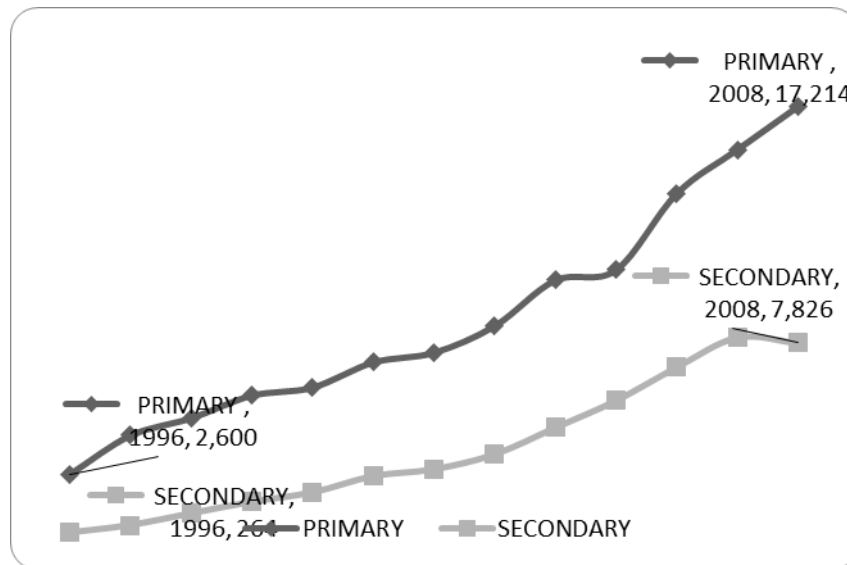
The 1980s saw further progress in this regard with the formation of the Malaysian Confederation of the Disabled (MCD) in 1985, comprising various impairment groups' organisations. Its aims were to seek collaboration and

unity between all categories of persons with disabilities to have a more direct link with the Government and to create a more accessible forum to deal with problems and challenges affecting them. The joint organisation achieved some success and in 1987 made some headway with Government policy when it presented its memorandum on equal opportunities. Their cooperation and influence appears to have grown with the active involvement of disabled persons' families.

National initiatives

Across the past twenty years these developments and a changing awareness about disability were reflected in what were in some cases substantial changes introduced by Government in relation to the education, welfare, training and employment of disabled people. Among the significant examples are the development of the community based rehabilitation (CBR) programmes in 1985 and the initiative of the special education curriculum for students with learning difficulties in the public school system in 1988 (Yeo, 2007). The enrolment of students with learning difficulties for the special education programme in primary school increased dramatically from 2600 in 1996 to 17,214 pupils in 2008, while for secondary school, the growth was from 264 to 7,826 students (Figure 2.1). This substantial rise may be taken to indicate a growing Government and to some extent public awareness of the importance of education for individuals with learning difficulties.

Figure 2.1 Special Education Programme for Students with Learning Difficulties



(Source: Special Education Division, 2008)

This period also saw changes in employment policy for people with disabilities. The employment quota policy of one per cent reserved for persons with disabilities in the public sector was introduced in the Government Service Circular No. 10/1988 (Public Service Department Malaysia, 2008). This policy was later promoted to the private sector in 1990 with the establishment of a National Committee for the Promotion of Employment Opportunities for persons with disabilities in the private sector. The Bangi Industrial Training and Rehabilitation Centre (PLPP Bangi) for persons with disabilities was established in 1998. These developments in the education and training system as well as in the employment policy aimed to increase the integration of disabled people in the community (Jayasooria, 1999; Mohd Salleh *et al.*, 2001).

Persons with disabilities were also offered the opportunity to actively engage in drawing up Government policies which then brought about other significant

changes in terms of accessibility (Jayasooria, 1999). These included the amendments of the Uniform Building By-Laws of 1984 (UBL 1984) in 1990 which requires all public buildings to provide necessary facilities for persons with disabilities and the Malaysian Standard Code of Practice for access by persons with disabilities to public buildings which were released two years later (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), 2003).

The influence of the voluntary associations is credited with being responsible, at least in part, for persuading the Government of Malaysia to sign the Proclamation on Full Participation and Equality of Persons with Disabilities in the Asia and Pacific on May 16, 1994 (Tiun *et al.*, 2011). Being a signatory to the proclamation, the Malaysian Government is responsible for promoting, protecting and ensuring full and equal rights and opportunities for disabled people. The employment policies introduced by the Government as well as the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the community are directly linked to these declarations (Jayasooria *et al.*, 1997). These policies include establishing a caring society in Malaysia as one of the nine challenges of Vision 2020 in 1996 which provide for the provision of services and the integration of persons with disabilities into the Malaysian community (Social Welfare Department Malaysia, 2009).

The first decade of this century saw a further development of new or revision of existing provision and policies for persons with disabilities. Important initiatives included the Code of Practice for the Employment of persons with

disabilities in the Private Sector in 1999 (Ministry of Human Resources, 1999) and upgraded the services with the introduction of an electronic labour exchange for persons with disabilities namely *Sistem Pendaftaran dan Penempatan OKU (SPOKU)* or Registration and Placement System for Persons with Disabilities in 2005 (Labour Department Malaysia, 2005). SPOKU is an application developed to assist persons with disabilities in finding matching jobs. This special assistance is in line with the Government campaign of being a caring society to espouse equal opportunities to every citizen.

Engagement with the international policy community

A serious commitment on the part of the government was indicated, when, together with other governments in the Asian and Pacific region, it adopted the Biwako Millenium Framework (BMF) for actions towards an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for persons with disabilities in the region in October 2002 (Economic Planning Unit, 2007). This BMF integrates disability concerns into national policies and programmes to achieve the targets which prioritise seven areas of interest: (1) self-help organizations of persons with disabilities and related family and parental associations, (2) women with disabilities, (3) early detection, early intervention and education, (4) training and employment, including self-employment, (5) access to built environments and public transport, (6) access to information and communications, including information and communications and assistive technologies, and (7) poverty alleviation through capacity-building, social

security and sustainable livelihood programmes (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), 2003). With regard to the aim of improving the employment situation of persons with disabilities, three targets have been established:

- (1) by 2012, at least 30 per cent of the signatories (member states) will ratify ILO Convention 159 concerning Vocational Rehabilitation on Employment (Disabled Persons);
- (2) by 2012, at least 30 per cent of all vocational training programmes in signatory countries will include persons with disabilities;
- (3) by 2010, reliable data on the employment and self-employment rates of persons with disabilities will exist in all countries.

(United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), 2003)

Moreover, a collaboration between the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the SWD on a project of Social Participation Inclusion in the Community and Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities began its first phase (2005-2010) and was continued to the second phase (2010-2012). This SWD-JICA project focused on the needs for inclusion for this group in open employment and mainstream community (Social Welfare Department Malaysia, 2009).

Besides, the National Policy on Persons with disabilities was introduced in 2007 as a positive measure prior to the enactment of the PWDA 2008 which marked a growing acknowledgement of the need to address the rights of

persons with disabilities in the country. The principle underpinning the act is to promote equal opportunities for persons with disabilities independent living in the community, paid employment, and access to the same amenities as their non-disabled peers (Persons with Disabilities Act, 2008). The year of 2008 saw a substantial development in relation to disability issues as following the Persons with Disabilities Act, a National Plan of Action for persons with disabilities (2008-2012) was announced and the Disabled Unit in SWD was upgraded to DPwDD (Social Welfare Department Malaysia, 2009). Malaysia became a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2008 and ratified it by 19th July 2010 (Social Welfare Department Malaysia, 2011b). This has been seen as a mark of Government commitment to enhance the well-being of persons with disabilities.

Financial support

Many cash incentives and benefits for persons with disabilities were also revised by various ministries in the first ten years of this century, including those related to social welfare, education, training and employment assistance. Among the benefits are the monthly allowances of RM50 per month for those who join the special education class in public schools and RM300 per month for those in higher education. In relation to employment, disabled employee allowances of RM300 per month are given to persons with disabilities earning salaries below RM1200 to encourage them to remain in employment and be self-supporting (Social Welfare Department Malaysia,

2009). Payments of RM150 per month are also given to those who are unable to undertake employment. In addition, to encourage employers to open more employment opportunities to this group, companies who hire persons with disabilities can claim double tax deductions on all salary payments³, expenses incurred in training and adaptations made to the workplace⁴.

To support the mobility of persons with disabilities, those using a nationally produced car - Proton or Perodua - are exempted from road tax and there is an entitlement of 50 per cent discount on public transport ticket prices. Nevertheless, in spite of all the support given by the Government during the past 20 years, the employment rate for persons with disabilities is still less than one per cent (Labour Department Malaysia, 2005) in the public and private sectors.

Other National ingredients of change

It can be argued that these policy developments were in part the result of various United Nations (UN) initiatives; the International Year of the Persons with disabilities (1981) followed by the UN Decade of Persons with disabilities with its World Program of Action (1983-1993) and the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with disabilities (1993-2002). However, it must

³ S. 34 (6)(e) Income Tax Act 1967

⁴ Income Tax (Deduction of Employment for Disabled Persons) Rules 1982

also be noted that public awareness on issues concerning persons with disabilities is also likely to have increased as a result of various policies and programmes carried out by the Government, guided by the National Social Policy 1990⁵ to improve the quality of life of this population. Seminars, workshops and campaigns were held from time to time to raise public awareness on issues relating to disabilities. It is also important to acknowledge the possible impact of self-advocacy among persons with learning difficulties which started to expand in the 1990s. The first Self Advocacy Society of Persons with Learning Difficulties was registered in 1995 and has increased in membership since that time.

An important reason behind the nature of the developments is that there has been a substantial change in the way in which disability is understood by most disabled activists in the last ten years. There has been a considerable shift away from the view of disability as a 'personal tragedy' rooted in the medical model of disability. More people are turning to the idea that the exclusion of persons with disabilities from important activities in the community is due largely to the barriers in the built environment, the way in which these activities are organized and the assumptions and attitudes of non-disabled people, rather than exclusively arising from individual impairment. Based on this understanding of the social model of disability

⁵ The National Social Policy 1990 is a social development policy aiming to improve human potential to achieve social integrity and stability with the objectives to ensure each individual, family and community is able to participate and contribute to national development as well as enjoy continuous contentment in life (Social Welfare Department Malaysia, 2009).

there is a growing recognition of the need to accommodate individual difference and provide opportunities for persons with disabilities to participate in society.

2.4 PERSONS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES IN MALAYSIA

In response to the aim of the research which focuses on the employment experiences of persons with learning difficulties, this section briefly describes the education, training and employment programmes in Malaysia. As previously mentioned, persons with learning difficulties are widely acknowledged to be left behind compared to other impairment groups. However, many developments have been offered by the Government to provide better services for this group as detailed below.

2.4.1 Education and training for persons with learning difficulties

Malaysia provides free education for all Malaysians. The public primary schools are divided into two categories depending on the medium of language used in teaching; Malay-medium National Schools (Sekolah Kebangsaan (SK)) and non-Malay-Medium National-type schools (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan (SJK)) or also known as vernacular schools which are Mandarin-medium and Tamil-medium. All schools admit students regardless of ethnicity and language background. In addition to the public schools, some students enrol in private or international school.

The general education in Malaysia starts with two years optional preschool between the ages of five or six. Young Malaysians enter compulsory primary

school at the age of seven starting with Standard One and remain for six years until Standard Six at the age of 12. During this period, pupils have internal assessment at the end of each year to identify their level of achievement. In Standard Six, the pupils have to sit for Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR) or Primary School Assessment Test. They then continue by beginning their lower secondary education at Form One at the age of 13. Pupils have to sit the Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) or Lower Certificate of Examination in Form Three at the age of 15.

Depending on the results of this examination, students can choose either to continue in an academic, technical or vocational stream at the upper secondary level of Form Four and Five. At the end of Form Five, students have to sit for an important examination of Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) or Malaysia Certificate of Education for qualification in their streaming area.

Depending on the results, students have different alternatives to choose and must decide whether to continue to enter the matriculation programme or A Level, do certificate or diploma courses, or opt to stay at school in the Lower and Upper Six Forms for another two years, where they have to take the Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia (STPM) or High School Certificate at the end of Form Six. If they pass this examination, they are eligible to enter institutes of higher education or universities or look for a job depending on their choice.

A standard special education structure was introduced after the development of the SED in 1997 which typically follows the general schooling system.

However, it was only introduced in the Malay-medium National school. Two

flexible extension years are offered for pupils with special educational needs depending on an individual readiness and maturity to undertake the curriculum (Special Education Division, 2008).

The term 'pupils with special education needs'⁶ refers to pupils with visual impairment, hearing impairment or learning disabilities. Pupils with physical impairments are not included since they can go to mainstream school. Specials school which cater for pupils with visual impairment or hearing impairment were set up to provide special assistance and expertise while the special education programme for pupils with learning difficulties is included in the mainstream school. The flow chart of education to employment for persons with learning difficulties is summarised in Appendix 2.1.

In general, the SED defines a 'student with learning difficulty' as any child who has been diagnosed and confirmed by a medical practitioner as being included in one of the following categories:

- Down's Syndrome
- Mild autism
- Developmentally delayed
- Mild cerebral palsy
- Mild mental retardation
- Hyperactive

⁶Education (Special Education) Regulation 1997

- Hypoactive
- Mild behaviour problems
- Mild emotional problems
- Mild attention deficit disorder and
- Other mild learning problems.

Based on this definition, only those who are defined as having mild disabilities are entitled to join special education programme (SEP) and the decision for enrolment is decided on certain criteria. The standard measure applied in the placement for this group is that the pupil is toilet-trained and understands simple instructions. Thus, those who are not achieving these basic requirements will be offered places in the CBR under the management of DPwDD. These centres also have a structured syllabus suited to the capacity of those students who mostly have significant conditions or impairments. Those with higher support needs will be placed in the rehabilitation centre called 'Taman Sinar Harapan' also under the responsibility of DPwDD to cater for their essential necessities.

In terms of inclusion, the students within the education system may be segregated or partly or fully included. The decision in relation to the degree of inclusion that is allowed is based on their level of ability to follow instructions in the mainstream classes. The development of policies on inclusion in education followed the UNESCO's declaration of "Education for All" (UNESCO, 2011) and aims to encourage interaction between students with special needs and mainstreams students (Special Education Division,

2008). While students in full or partial inclusive education are taught the national curriculum, those who remain in the segregated programme will have a different syllabus known as “Primary and Secondary Special Education Syllabus for Learning Difficulties” (Special Education Division, 2004). This syllabus concentrates on reading, writing and counting skills and also behaviour modification. It concentrates on four main areas namely living skills, functional academic skills, spiritual and moral education and social, recreation and creativity areas.

This general syllabus acts as a guideline and needs a flexible and adaptable approach from qualified teachers to ensure that it suits their students’ abilities and interests. Thus, the practicality and implementation of the curriculum depends a great deal on the creativity and commitment of the teacher. Therefore, teachers in special education programmes play important roles in shaping the syllabus to support students to be independent and able to contribute to the development of the country.

Despite the fact that some students with learning difficulties are given the opportunity to follow the national curriculum, they would not usually be expected to sit examinations for the national assessment system. As a result, it is likely that most leave the education system without any qualification. However, there are no data currently available on this issue.

Realising the importance of a proper training programme, vocational training was introduced within the special education curriculum in 2008. It aimed to enable students to acquire communication, social and basic vocational skills

for employment (Special Education Division, 2008). The vocational syllabus has three main elements covering employment skills, training and sheltered workshop:

1. **Training within the school in the form of projects which are planned.** For example, farming and selling produce. Another example is entrepreneurial activities such as making ice-cream, biscuits, cakes and other products to sell or rearing fish, birds and other animals.
2. **Job training which involves external parties or external jobs.** This involves obtaining products from factories to do packaging or assembly during school hours. Another form of job training is to produce hand made products such as batik painting, flowers and others for sale.
3. **Practical job training.** Simulating or creating an actual work environment for a particular job such as washing cars, laundrette, and others which can be done in the school. The students are also sent for the practical work experience component to the open labour market with supervision by a work supervisor.

(Special Education Division, 2008:37)

The function of a sheltered workshop is to provide experience, training, assessment and employment for persons with learning difficulties. Some sheltered workshops operate independently under the management of the school while others have a contract with an agency which provides employment services. The product produced in the sheltered workshop is of secondary importance while the individual's work experience is of primary

importance to instil interest, interpersonal skills and fulfil the need for social life. It is necessary for sheltered workshops to have vocational skills assessment, general or specific job training, training opportunities for individuals with learning difficulties, opportunities for recreation and employment services to assist in obtaining a job in the future (Special Education Division, 2008).

The vocational skills training courses for persons with learning difficulties are also taught in Indahpura Vocational School which caters for all students with disabilities. There is a different curriculum for each category of impairment group. The curriculum for students with learning difficulties consists of selections of courses: beautician, food preparation/ kitchen assistant, linen attendant/laundry room attendant/housekeeping. Additionally, vocational training is also offered by non-governmental organisations (NGOs). However, since the medium languages used are Chinese or English they have low participation from the Malay communities.

2.4.2 Employment opportunities for persons with learning difficulties

Employment and disability are currently highly topical issues debated among policy makers and practitioners in Malaysia (Amar-Singh HSS, 2008). This is a result of a growing awareness of the issues faced by persons with disabilities in entering the labour market. This awareness has arisen in a large part from the campaigns of the disability movement, which resulted in major policy developments in this area in recent years (Jayasooria *et al.*, 1997).

The Malaysian economy reacted sharply to the global financial crisis with a fall of two per cent of GDP in 2009 but then recovered with a growth of seven per cent in 2010 before resuming its long-run annual rate of 5 per cent in 2011. Employment, was barely affected by the downturn and continued to rise, though the unemployment rate did turn up a little in 2009 before dropping back to 3 per cent (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2013). Thus the labour market background against which to carry out innovations in widening access to employment, such as the one studied in this thesis, has, therefore, been good; the unemployment rate has been historically low for Malaysia and half that of the current global average of 6 per cent (International Labour Organization, 2012).

It is, nonetheless, unfortunate that there are no regular national statistics regarding employment and unemployment among persons with disabilities by which to monitor the situation. Even so, the issue of unemployment among them has been regarded as a 'never ending' dilemma in Malaysia (Norani Mohd Salleh *et al.*, 2001). In a situation where there has not been a tradition of employment and where there have been few employment rights for persons with disabilities, there has been a heavy reliance on the good will of employers to open up job opportunities. The limitations of such an approach need to be understood in a context where prejudices about the ability of this group are widespread and, consequently, opportunities to join the workforce limited (Siti Hasiah Mohd Husaini, 2006). The employment rate for persons with disabilities remains very low.

The crisis of joblessness among disabled people is particularly acute for persons with learning difficulties and most of them are either placed in sheltered employment or remain at home without paid work (Jayasooria *et al.*, 1997). This is due to assumptions that are made about their intellectual limitations as well as their lack of suitable education and vocational training (Yeo, 2007).

The employment opportunities for persons with learning difficulties are mostly limited to unskilled or non-professional jobs such as production operators, handicraft, general workers, shop assistants, gardeners and sweepers or other work that does not require more than basic communication or interpersonal skills (Norani Mohd Salleh *et al.*, 2001). Moreover, they are often being paid on piece-rates as they are assumed to be less productive than other non-disabled workers. As a result, they are frequently on a low wage and in addition, may earn less than other people including other groups of disabled employees (Norani Mohd Salleh *et al.*, 2001).

A range of reports have drawn attention to the poor employment opportunities and high unemployment rates among persons with learning difficulties. The Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (2004) reported that persons with learning difficulties face considerable challenges as they attempt to get a job after completing their secondary education. Reports from the self-advocacy groups of persons with learning difficulties in Malaysia stated that 29 to 55 per cent of their members are unemployed (Asia

Community Service, 2006; Dignity & Services, 2005). Chen also reported that persons with learning difficulties had the lowest rates of employment of any other group of persons with disabilities in Malaysia (Chen, 2007). In addition, a survey of 218 adults with learning difficulties in Penang reported that 55 per cent of those who participated had had no work experience at all. Of the rest, almost 25 per cent worked in the sheltered workshops, five per cent in family businesses and only nine per cent had worked in the wider community or open employment (Asia Community Service, 2006: 2). Responding to the situation, Jamali, the president of the first self-advocacy society for persons with learning difficulties in Malaysia was quoted as saying that "Employment is a big issue in our community. It is one of our primary concerns and through our society, we hope to push to changes that will create more jobs for us" (Pang, 2005:15).

Supported employment is seen as one means to enable people with learning difficulties to access mainstream employment but this approach has been introduced only recently and is not fully practised yet. There is still a lack of supported employment options with appropriate supports such as job coaches. However, since 2005 a series of training and workshops in the project of Social Participation Inclusion in the Community and Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities by the partnership of SWD and JICA have increased the awareness among people with learning difficulties of independent living, disability equality and employment options including those with job coaching.

When their awareness was raised, some persons with learning difficulties tried to move forward to integrate in the community by participating in the mainstream workforce. A report of United Voice (UV) members reveals that 37 per cent of their members work in the open market, 33 per cent work in sheltered workshops and the rest are unemployed (Dignity & Services, 2005:2). This appears to support the views that given the appropriate support and a suitable job many persons with learning difficulties are able to enter mainstream employment. Their employability was further demonstrated when a hypermarket started to employ 13 employees with learning difficulties in 2007 and increased the number to 82 within two years. As there has been positive feedback on this first wave of recruitment, more retail employers have followed this company's lead by opening more job opportunities for people with learning difficulties.

2.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter offers a brief overview of the demographics of Malaysia with its diverse population before proceeding to a summary of key disability issues in the context of Malaysia. The development and progress on disability related policies and legislation can be seen as an indication of the Government's formal commitment to improve the circumstances of persons with disabilities. It can be argued that these developments indicate something of a shift from a charity based approach to one concerned with rights. This chapter also outlines key relevant aspects of the education, training and employment

systems in order to give a better understanding of the situation and experiences of individuals with disabilities as they face the world of work.

The following chapter reviews the literature on the social theory of disability relating to the issues concerning to persons with learning difficulties in terms of their ability to work and the biased treatments against them.

CHAPTER 3

UNDERSTANDING DISABILITY AND PERSONS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The past 30 years have witnessed crucial changes in the ways in which disability is understood and theorised, largely due to the efforts of disabled people's movements and academic endeavour associated with them. This chapter will review key elements of the social theory of disability that have been influential in the past three decades, focusing particularly on work that has shaped the approach of this research as well as the understanding of the experience of persons with learning difficulties in the labour market in Malaysia. Finally, the impact of the disability models on the policies and provisions will also be reviewed.

3.2 THEORISING DISABILITY

This section is in three parts. It will first explore the concept of disability in the United Kingdom and other countries by concentrating on the development of the social theories of disability which are believed to be critical in relation to the current understanding of disability. Second, it gives a brief overview of how disability is conceptualised in Islam. Because Malaysia is an Islamic country, it is important to try to link understandings within Islam to other ways of theorising disability. Finally, the section focuses on theorising the position of persons with learning difficulties within the social theories of disability. It has been argued by some that this has received only limited attention (Chappell, 1998; Goodley, 2001).

3.2.1 Social theories of disability

Earlier understandings of disability tended to rely on an individual model of disability (Oliver, 1990) with two dominant perspectives: the moral and the medical. Those understandings with a moral emphasis tended historically to see disability as a punishment from God whereas the medical model regards disability as a medical problem which limits the ability of an individual to act 'normally' (Goodley, 2011). According to this individual model, people are disabled by their inability to function (Hughes and Patterson, 1997) and since the problem lies within the individual, it is the role of medicine and psychology to fix them to 'normality' (Oliver, 1996). While it is common to refer to an approach which attributes problems to the individual, as 'the medical model', Oliver argued that it is more accurate to term it 'the individual model'. The medicalization of disability is then regarded as one aspect of an individualised approach.

It has been argued that such a view also led to the difficulties encountered by disabled people being understood as personal tragedies or misfortunes (Finkelstein, 1980; Oliver, 1990). The individual model has shaped services for disabled people including rehabilitation and educational provision, so that their primary focus was to assist disabled children and adults to overcome what were defined as individual problems in an effort to enable them to fit into society (Oliver, 1990). Until it was challenged mainly by disabled people themselves, the individual model of disability dominated the social welfare

policies, strategies and service delivery systems reflecting the basic tenets of the models (Goodley, 2001).

In many countries, the latter part of the twentieth century saw the emergence of disabled people's movements developing and voicing criticisms of the individual model and also what has been termed the medical model (Oliver, 1996). In the United Kingdom, the social model of disability was born out of anger of disabled activists arguing that the understandings of disability based on the individual model were typically elaborated by non-disabled professionals (Oliver, 1996). Disabled activists argued that people are disabled by society not by their bodies (Oliver, 1990) and that they are disabled when there is a societal failure to take into account needs arising from physical or mental differences. Key to this set of arguments was questioning assumptions about the nature and existence of normality and celebrating diversity and difference (Morris, 1991).

Disabled activists and academics argued that the responsibility for the restriction experienced by disabled people should be moved from the individual to the social structures in which they lived. As a consequence, in order to improve the situation of disabled people, efforts should be directed towards societal change rather than rehabilitation or individual adjustment (Barnes *et al.*, 1999).

The Union of the Physically Impaired against Segregation (UPIAS) is usually credited with initiating the transformation of understanding of disability in the United Kingdom (UK) with the publication of 'The Fundamental Principles of

Disability in 1976 (Campbell & Oliver, 1996). Instead of concentrating on the impairment within the individual, they argued that disability should be seen as social oppression. They saw disability as socially constructed through the ways that society excluded and isolated persons with disabilities from being able to enjoy full participation (Barnes *et al.*, 1999). This new formulation of disability was then termed as 'social model of disability' by Oliver in the 1980s (Thomas, 2007) and was given further academic credibility by writers and activists such as Finkelstein (1980) and Barnes (1991).

Soon, the social model of disability came to dominate disability politics and the newly-emerging field of disability studies in the UK. Writers and activists working on the social model made a distinction between disability and impairment. For example, Jenny Morris (1991) states that 'impairment' refers to functional limitations affecting a person whereas 'disability' refers to the loss or limitation of opportunities owing to social, physical and attitudinal barriers. This redefining and disconnecting of disability from impairment is regarded as one of the most crucial and formative ideas and the most influential insight which motivates disability movements. The original work on the social model and the understandings that have grown from it underpin much of the way disability is approached in the UK today (Thomas, 2007). However, as one would expect, some of the original understandings have been contested or developed in a range of ways. The lack of attention within the social model to the impact of impairment on the lives of individuals has been a critical point of argument (Crow, 1996; Morris, 1991; Shakespeare & Watson, 2001).

Feminist theoretical perspectives for example, have produced great insight into understanding disability and have made significant challenges to the dominance of the social model as it was sometimes conceived. In *'Pride against Prejudice'*, Jenny Morris (1991:9) argues that the disability movement in the UK has been dominated by men and this has led to a "...tendency to avoid confronting the personal experience of disability..." Morris (1991:9) asserts that the neglect of personal experience which is such an important part of identities within the social model is severely damaging the disability movement.

In addition to this, Crow (1996) suggests a need to independently examine the whole experience of both disability and impairment and also to integrate them. It is believed that only by understanding the complexities of disability and impairment can disability studies have a significant influence in struggling against the oppression and exclusion of persons with disabilities. The issue for Shakespeare and Watson (2001) is not to reduce disability to the form of medical diagnoses but to recognise the different impacts and implications of different impairments.

Similarly, Hughes and Paterson (1997) further the argument against what has sometimes been seen as the social model's neglect of the body when understanding disability. They put the case for its expansion to include an 'embodied notion of disability', which can support the development of a 'sociology of impairment' (Hughes and Paterson, 1997:326).

Correspondingly, Shakespeare and Watson (2001) stress that people may be disabled by both social barriers and their bodies. Ignoring impairment then disregards a major part of daily personal experience. Instead of saying *“people are disabled by society not their bodies”* they suggest that *“people are disabled by society as well as by their bodies”* (Shakespeare and Watson, 2001:11).

Accordingly, Abberley (2002) suggests that disability studies should not just focus on the negative effects of barriers and the need for their removal but should assemble the total experience of disability including impairment and the differences between impairments.

In response to those criticisms, Oliver (2009) in his new edition of *‘Understanding Disability’* addresses what he regards as a misunderstanding among disabled activists of the social model of disability. He argues that the social model of disability does not ignore the concept of impairment/disability distinction; the stress on societal barriers in the model was intended to introduce a shift of attention to the problems caused by disabling environments, barriers and cultures rather than viewing persons with disabilities as the source of the problem.

Notwithstanding the debates and criticisms, there is a range of interrelated developments in the social theory of disability that share some of the key assumptions of the original work on the social model. The affirmative model for example, was developed by French and Swain (2000) to appreciate impairment as characteristics of difference and acclaim the positive social identities of the disability community. Their point is that removing the social

barriers as proposed by the social model is not an absolute approach to the response to disability (French and Swain, 2000) as persons with disabilities will still be seen as disabled by their impairment. Thus, positive attitudes towards their identities should be encompassed to counter the negativity and patronisation that persons with disabilities encounter in their everyday lives. This model offers an additional framework to make sense of the individual and collective experience of impairment within a disabling society.

Moreover, in theorising disability, it is crucial to recognise that the experience of disability is shaped by other social divisions to which individuals belong. While there are some commonalities among many disabled persons because of the shared experience of living with impairment and disability, there will also be marked differences depending on the intersections of gender, social class, ethnic origin and sexual orientation (Goodley, 2011). Disabled women for instance are more likely to experience greater oppression compared to disabled men in terms of economic participation or access to public life (Meekosha, 2004). Black disabled people may experience the negative impact of the complex interaction of disability discrimination and racism (Stuart, 1993; Michalko, 2002).

Other countries have also debated and developed understandings of disability which have achieved some of the same outcomes in terms of rights, empowerment and inclusion for disabled people. In the USA and Canada a minority group model was developed, in line with the political tradition of American Black civil rights and the queer politics' movements

(Goodley, 2011:12). Similar to the social model, the minority model distinguishes the causal relationships that govern impairment and disability, focusing on the social, cultural and political features of disability, but does not redefine disability as social oppression (Shakespeare, 2006:24).

However, arguing the conception of separating disabled people as a minority or special group in the minority model, Bickenbach and others (1999), inspired by an American sociologist Zola, articulate a universalism approach which emphasises the different experiences shared among persons with disabilities, due to their impairment, as part of the general human situation. Disability is seen as flexible and “*may be experienced at particular times or over time by large proportions of given populations*” (Clements & Read, 2008:6). Increasingly, some writers (eg. Albrecht and Bury (2001), Bickenbach (2001), Morris (1991), Read and Clements (2008)) have discussed a human rights approach which uses universal human rights as a benchmark for all groups of people, including those with disabilities. Therefore, when disabled people live through the oppressive experience, it is understood as experiencing social injustice in the distribution of opportunities and resources that limit the rate of participation in all spheres of social life. This is not an alternative to other social theories of disability, they may be mutually reinforcing.

In the Nordic countries of Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Iceland and Finland, the relational model of disability has been developed by disability researchers such as Bjarnason, Tøssebro, Gudavsson, Kristiansen, Traustaddóttir, Björnsdóttir and Vehmas (Goodley, 2011). This Nordic

relational model adopts a more interdisciplinary approach which employs the notion of normalisation “...as a method for assessing services, the practice of professionals and the impact of social policy...” (Goodley, 2011:16). It focuses on the mismatch between the individual and the environment which arises because of both individual differences and the failure of the environment to accommodate the range of people. Moreover, disability is seen as situational or situation-specific (Tossebro, 2002, 2004 in Goodley, 2011). For instance, a person with a visual impairment is not disabled when using the telephone and a deaf person is not disabled in a setting where everyone speaks sign language. Disability is also perceived as “relative, a continuum rather than a dichotomy” (Shakespeare, 2006:26).

In contrast to disability studies in the UK and North America, Nordic disability research is seen as being less linked to activism and the disability movement (Traustadóttir, 2006; Vehmas & Mäkelä, 2008) which has, according to Shakespeare (2006) limited its practical effects and its focus on oppression and discrimination. However, it has been argued that it has helped to deliver significant progress in the disability services with the promotion of empowerment in enhancing the everyday lives of disabled people in Nordic countries (Goodley, 2011).

In short, it is apparent that there are interconnections in these developments in theorising disability. It is open to debate as to whether these developments are variants of the social model, developments in social theory that are

influenced by the social model or developments that are related to but possibly separate from the social model.

3.2.2 The Conception of Disability in Islam

As Malaysia is an Islamic country in which 60 per cent of the population are Muslims, it is important to have a general understanding of disability from an Islamic perspective. However, having reviewed the literature, it is clear that there are only a few sources which are concerned with Islam and disability. It is inevitable, therefore, that this section draws heavily on the work of a small number of authors (for example Ali, 2008; Bazna & Hatab, 2005; Ong, 1990). This overview does not aim to offer a comprehensive treatment of disability in Islam but rather to give an additional and important dimension to how disability is understood in an Islamic context.

In Islam, the Qur'an⁷ "*acts as a constitution of social justice*" and it is supplemented by Hadith⁸ "*which constitute the primary sources of Islamic law*" (Ali, 2008: 116). In relation to disability, through the evidence from the Qur'an and Hadith, Islam is claimed to view impairments from a human rights perspectives (Ali, 2008) and as morally neutral (Bazna & Hatab, 2005). It is emphasised that Islam embraces the ethos of equality of all human beings (Ali, 2008) as evident in the following saying of the Prophet Muhammad:

⁷ The Qur'an is believed to contain the revelations of God to the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h)

⁸ Hadith is believed to be the words and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h)

“Verily, God does not look at your bodies or your appearances, but looks into your hearts” (Muslim, 2564).

This Hadith signifies the equal basis of judgement of Islam for all human kind regardless of any condition. This reflects the equality of respect for human dignity by which the only distinction between Muslims is the taqwa⁹:

“O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted” (Al-Hujurat, 13).

This attitude to equality, it is stressed should be applied similarly towards persons with disabilities. It is emphasised that there is very little evidence in the Qur’an or Hdith that Islam views persons with disabilities as not having similar rights as other human kind. This is demonstrated when Allah straightforwardly reproves the Prophet for his impoliteness¹⁰ against Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum, in Surah ‘Abasa: 1-10:

He frowned and turned away because the blind man approached him! Yet for all thou didst know, [O, Muhammad,] he might perhaps have grown in purity, or have been reminded [of the truth], and helped by this reminder. Now as for him who believes himself to be self-sufficient – to him didst thou give thy whole attention, although thou art not accountable for his failure to attain to purity; but as for him who came unto thee full of eagerness and in awe [of God] – him didst thou disregard! (‘Abasa, 1-10)

⁹Taqwa is an Islamic concept of self-awareness which in a broad sense involves thankfulness and respect for God and his creation

¹⁰ The Prophet frowned and turned away when being approached by a blind follower to seek a clarification on the teachings. See Asad, M. (1980). Message of the Qur’an. Lahore, Pakistan: Maktaba Jawahar Uloom.

It is apparent from this story that persons with disabilities should have the right to be treated with dignity and to have full regard similar to other non-disabled. Thus, Islam could be understood to conceptualise disability from the perspective of human rights (Ali, 2008).

The Quran, consistent in its view that every person is potentially perfect seems to view any impairment as morally neutral, neither a curse nor a blessing since they are part of the human condition (Bazna & Hatab, 2005; Musa, 2002). Muslims believe that Allah has created people into different races, colours, and having various abilities. While some of them are given particular gifts, others are deprived of these gifts and thus are disabled. When depriving a person of certain ability, Allah rewards him by granting him other gift, with which he excels others. For instance, those people who are deprived of sight have greatly sensitive ears that they can hear very low beats or movements around them. They are given excellence in many other abilities to compensate for their imperfection. This is regarded as a nature of life (The Islamic Workplace, 2012).

Moreover, in line with the Quranic verse that *"God does not burden any human being with more than he is well able to bear"* (Al-Baqarah, 286), Islam offers an exemption from certain orders and obligations so as to suit the ability of the individual to their particular circumstances. For instance, in performing the daily prayer, exceptions are given to those who cannot fulfil the requirements in prayer. If he cannot stand for the prayer, he may pray sitting down. If he cannot sit, he may lie down. In short he should complete the prayer

somehow. Despite this exception, Islam encourages individuals to be the best both in the spiritual and temporal spheres.

In addition to equality, Islam adopts the notion of justice which is the supreme virtue and obligation of Islam as stated in the Quran:

“O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm for Allah, witnesses in justice, and do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just; that is nearer to righteousness. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is acquainted with what you do” (Al-Maidah, 8).

Being just means to place something in the right place. Some people regard justice as giving equal but not necessarily identical treatment. Sometimes, justice is achieved through inequality (Hasnain *et al.*, 2008). In response to the treatment of persons with disabilities, it is important that justice should be adopted for different condition or limitations experienced by persons with disabilities in every human activity.

Bazna and Hatab (2005) in their analysis of the Quran found that the concept of disability is not mentioned conventionally. Instead, the Quran places greater emphasis on the spiritual than on the physical signifies from the words chosen in the Quran as will be discussed below. This does not mean that Islam is not concerned about persons with disabilities, but to demonstrate the concept of equality to every man without giving special treatment for persons with disabilities.

Besides, the analysis of the Arabic language used in the Quran by Bazna and Hatab (2005) show that the words used in the Quran did not signify the physical limitations of the individual but more spiritual orientation. For

instance, the word *Amiya* is used to represent the blind people. In Arabic language, *Amiya* denotes not seeing or not able to see in a spiritual not physical way. In fact, *Dhareer* is actually the word which refers to those who are blind physiologically or who lost their eyes. But the Quran used the word *Amiya* which did not carry a negative connotation. This is similar to other types of impairments such as for mute, the Quran used *Abkam* instead of *Akhras* and for deaf; the Quran used *Assum* instead of *Atrash*. This suggests that Islam refrains from having any stigma or labelling of persons with disabilities according to their limitations.

Although the Quran makes a few references to disability (Bazna and Hatab, 2005), most sources tend to focus on the disadvantages created by society that are faced by those who might not possess the social, economic or physical attributes which people value. For example, there are verses which teach about suitable behaviour towards disabled people and the appropriate circumstances to be created to benefit this group. Islam understands that this concept of disadvantage is socially constructed, therefore society is responsible for identifying the plight of the disadvantaged and developing better conditions and status for them.

From the verses of the Quran and Hadith referred to in this section, it could be understood that Islam encourages non-discriminatory action against persons with disabilities. The Quran also places clear obligations on family, state and society to share and care for persons with disabilities. Moreover, Islam encourages the inclusion of all people, regardless of ability in the larger

society. The Prophet's behavior towards disabled people has given us lessons on the Islamic position and attitude towards persons with disabilities. This is shown by the Prophet Muhammad in his attitude towards a blind man who asked to be exempted from attending congregational prayer at the mosque and pray individually at home due to his impairment. Regardless of his gentleness and leniency, the Prophet denied his permission and exhorted him to attend as other people. In this situation, the Prophet's attitudes may be regarded as harsh by some people but the significance of this attitude is in the fact that he gives attention to an example of how persons with disabilities should be treated.

Another example is that the Prophet also positioned the status of persons with disabilities with a prominent status in the community by appointing persons with disabilities as *Muazzin*¹¹ and participants as fighters in war. In addition, the Prophet greeted Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum with respect and humility, and designated him as the Leader of Madinah many times in his own absence. He did not regard Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum's blindness as a hindrance in his ability to carry out his duties.

From these examples, it is apparent that the inclusion and integration of persons with disabilities have been encouraged in Islam since the first period of the Islamic traditions. It is regrettable that this integrative attitude of the

¹¹A muazzin is the chosen person at a mosque who leads the call to prayer (adhan) five times a day

Prophet Muhammad and the teachings from the Quran are not fully followed by many Muslims. As Ali (2008:118) observed in relation to disabled people in Pakistan, there is a stark contrast between the obligations placed on people by the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad and what happens in terms of the reality of provisions in law and policy. Persons with disabilities tend to remain isolated within the Muslim community. Families caring for persons with disabilities receive very little attention and support from their religious communities. Muslims with disabilities also feel excluded from learning and engaging in spiritual and social activities (Bazna & Hatab, 2005; Ong, 1990). These practices of current Muslims may be tainted by their local cultures, or result from their low-level understanding of Islam.

While it is true that many Muslims do show respect and care for persons with disabilities, the assistance and kindness offered are considered as the way of fulfilling their responsibilities towards this group as they are seen as sources of divine blessings. While this charitable giving and sympathy may currently be an ordinary way that many Muslims fulfil what they understand as their obligations, it is entirely possible to argue that creating equal opportunities or extending the rights of persons with disabilities is completely in keeping with the teachings of the Prophet and the word of the Quran.

3.2.3 Social Model of Disability and Persons with Learning Difficulties

Since a changed understanding of disability through the social model was fought for initially by those with physical impairments, it has been argued that

work which draws on it has focused to a great degree on the experiences of those with physical and sensory impairments. Its ability adequately to capture the experiences of people with all impairments, including those living with learning difficulties has been questioned (Chappell, 1998; Goodley & Rapley, 2001; Goodley, 2001). There have been some concerns about how well a model that was originally developed in relation to people living with physical impairment, reflects the experience of persons with learning difficulties.

Goodley (2001) suggests that the exclusion of persons with learning difficulties from social model of disability happens since learning difficulty is treated differently to other forms of impairment by persons with and without disabilities. There may remain an implicit assumption that learning difficulties or mental impairments are inherently biological and this assumption can be attributed largely to cultural, political and societal factors that influence attitudes towards different impairments (Goodley, 2001). Some work suggests that many disabled people themselves perceive a hierarchy of impairments with persons with learning difficulties often placed at the bottom of the list (Deal, 2003; Docherty *et al.*, 2010). Similarly, Triango (cited in Deal, 2003) in an American study showed that mental retardation, alcoholism and mental illness were the least preferred from a scale of twenty-one impairments.

As a result, persons with learning difficulties may be left feeling unsure of where they fit in with the social model and the disabled people movements

(Humphrey, 2001). These discouraging situations have inspired some persons with learning difficulties to organise politically and form a new social movement, the self-advocacy movement (Armstrong, 2002; Goodley, 2001; Goodley, 2001b). There is quite a longstanding tradition of self-advocacy movements among persons with learning difficulties in European and North America. With the aiming of enabling marginalised voices to be heard and positive disabled identities to be established, the self-advocacy movements challenge discrimination and promote the notion of an inclusive society and self-empowerment.

A number of scholars have indicated features of the lives of persons with learning difficulties which make the social model of disability appropriate and relevant to their experience (Chappell *et al.*, 2001; Goodley *et al.*, 2003; Goodley, 1998). Firstly, it is argued that social model applies equally to persons with learning difficulties in terms of the impact of social change and economic development on persons with disabilities which contributed to their oppression. For instance, Dowse (2009) argues that the transition from reliance on institutionalisation and professionals to the authorisation of the power and control among persons with learning difficulties presents new challenges for them in terms of both personal and political experience.

Furthermore, it has been argued that persons with learning difficulties also experience similar marginalisation to people with other impairments in most parts of their lives (Stalker, 2012). For instance Emerson *et al.* (2005) claim that persons with learning difficulties share quite similar poverty rates to

people with other types of impairments, which is higher than rates for non-disabled people. In addition, in common with many other disabled people they are frequently, excluded, overlooked and reliant on other people's convictions and decisions. Moreover, in getting a meaningful job; they are more likely than non-disabled people to have to show their competencies before being offered any opportunity to work (Simpson, 1999).

In addition, along with other people with disabilities, persons with learning difficulties have been seen to face the type of 'psycho-emotional' disablism addressed by Thomas (2007). This 'psycho-emotional' disablism means:

*“The intended or ‘unintended’ ‘hurtful’ words and social actions of non-disabled people (parents, professionals, complete strangers, others) in interpersonal engagement with people with impairments”
(Thomas, 2007:72)*

These experiences will give an impact to 'barriers to being' which further confine the boundaries in most areas of their lives equally to other persons with disabilities.

The final dimension emphasised is that though persons with learning difficulties are assumed not to confront physical barriers as experienced by those from other impairment groups, they may frequently face barriers in terms of exchanging information (Stalker and Lerpiniere, 2008) and perplexing new information technology (Docherty *et al.*, 2010).

Those dimensions addressed in the social model of disability show that persons with learning difficulties share many comparable experiences with

other persons with disabilities. However, there are some experiences which may be distinctive to persons with learning difficulties.

3.3 DISABILITY MODELS: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

In the past, policies and rehabilitative programmes based upon the medical model, were designed and implemented within the framework of government ministries in Malaysia that were responsible for the provision of services for persons with disabilities. Some of the specialized services or programmes provided to persons with disabilities may be special schools, sheltered workshops, segregated residential facilities and/or special social welfare programs such as disability benefits.

As mentioned earlier, the fundamental principle of the individual and medical approach is underpinned by the traditional concept of rehabilitation and social assistance services. It is believed that since disability is an individual's own problem, rehabilitation and social assistance services will help the individual to become as 'normal' as possible and to fit in and adapt to society. However, this approach has proved ineffective in ensuring that persons with disabilities gained access to all sectors of society and has been challenged by disabled people's movements. As a result, as described earlier, internationally there has been a paradigm shift away from the medical model and towards the social model of disability which strives to ensure the civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights of persons with disabilities are protected.

It is increasingly accepted in international conventions and by the state parties that are signatories to them, that the exclusion of persons with disabilities from many important activities in society is due in large part to barriers in the built environment, the way in which activities are organised, the assumptions non-disabled people make, the attitudes they hold and also inequalities of power, rather than exclusively arising from the individual's impairment. Based on this understanding of the social model of disability and the belief that it is natural for differences to exist between people in society, it is certain that Malaysian society has to change to accommodate these differences and to give persons with disabilities the opportunity to take their place in society. The nature of the social assistance or support should be changed in response to the needs and preferences of persons with disabilities and not solely under the control of professionals. It is argued that the assistance provided in keeping with the social model and the conventions where equal opportunities are offered to enable persons with disabilities to fulfil their human rights (Morris, 2011).

Moreover, the social model of disability also believes societal and environmental barriers influence the interpretation of disability in society. Failure of the society to provide the needs of persons with disabilities and satisfying only the non-disabled people leads to discrimination. This shows the inter-connections of individuals and their social context. For instance, there is often an assumption that persons with disabilities have difficulty in relation to work or are unable to join the labour force. However, given the right training and support as well as a suitable infrastructure at the

workplace, they can fulfil their jobs as other individuals (Burge *et al.*, 2007). Thus, it is argued that the evaluation of persons with disabilities should also change from 'what they can do' to 'what they can be' (Barnes, 1999; Marks, 1999; Shakespeare, 2006).

Defining persons with disabilities purely in terms of others' understandings of them, or priorities about their impairments will almost inevitably deny their abilities and give a negative perception of 'what they can be' and the direction their lives might take. It is important for disabled people to have the opportunity to define an outcome and also the route to achieve it that they regard as being in their best interests. For example, instead of focusing on their way of walking, the central issue should be on the more universally valued concept of mobility both in itself and as a means to an end.

The equality and social inclusion agenda, using the social model of disability, connotes a rights-based perspective that persons with disabilities should be offered similar chances to fulfil their individual potential and enjoy the same life opportunities as others. This agenda proposes tackling the systemic barriers which prevented persons with disabilities from participating fully in employment (Patton *et al.*, 2005)

Furthermore, the fact that new ways of theorising disability and the central tenets of the disabled peoples' movements have influenced the ways that research is approached. Disability studies was defined as politically-engaged scholarship (Abberley, 1999) and when those involved debated the role of research some argued strongly that its emancipatory purpose should aim to

find out how to achieve what disabled people had already decided that they wanted (Oliver, 1997). The connection between activism and the academic has been highlighted as crucial to bringing this decision into reality (Abberley, 1999).

In the Malaysian context, history shows that since the 1940s the influence of the medical model of disability and a charitable approach could be seen in most of the social service - for example the rehabilitation service and institutional care provided by both the government and non-government agencies as discussed in Chapter Two. Later in the 1980s, with the development of greater disability awareness, this concept of social model of disability can be seen to have had some influence via the greater emphasis being placed on the physical and social barriers restricting those who live with impairments (Jayasooria & Ooi, 1994; Norani Mohd Salleh *et al.*, 2001). Welfare approaches based on the social model of disability are gradually being recognised to provide direct support for full and equal participation of all persons with disabilities without requiring functional recovery as prerequisite.

A good example of the social model of disability approach is reflected in the Biwako Framework (BMF) for Action on Disability (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), 2003) which strives to ensure that governments in Asia and the Pacific take the social model of disability seriously as well as view disability as a human rights issue. This BMF incorporates disability concerns into national policy and

programmes towards developing an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for persons with disabilities (Economic Planning Unit, 2007). In response to this, the new approach of supported employment which promotes the conception of employability among persons with learning difficulties might be regarded as reflecting this transition from the medical to the social model of disability.

Nonetheless, in striving for the rights of this group of persons with disabilities which do not come automatically, consultation with, and the involvement of stakeholders are required in the development of national policies, strategies and targets: that is, government ministries, civil society organizations (i.e., Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs)), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and other key social partners such as representatives from the private sector, families and persons with disabilities, themselves. It is important to accept the views of persons with disabilities and consider them as experts in reflecting on their own lives and providing first-hand impressions of the services provided.

3.4 CONCLUSION

The aim of the chapter was to introduce key theoretical frameworks to enable understanding of disability in general and persons with learning difficulties in particular. This chapter theorises disability by exploring the understanding of disability from the lenses of two prevalent models- the individual and the social- as well as other related disability theories such as affirmative, minority, universalism and relational models. In addition, the concept of

disability from Islamic perspectives is also considered. The discussions conclude with reflections on concepts or ideas which have been translated into practice including research endeavours.

It would appear that certain areas continue to be dominated by a medical model of disability whereby disability is seen as an individual, essentially private problem or personal tragedy. This is particularly clear in relation to the welfare system where inflexible dual categories of 'able to work' and 'not able to work' continue to apply. Thus, the focus is on the rehabilitation of the individual to enable them to work rather than tackling the barriers created by society that make finding and holding down paid employment difficult for many persons with disabilities. Despite the persistent influence of this individual model, the social model has undoubtedly made a significant contribution to the ways in which persons with disabilities are viewed and treated in society today.

The insights of the social model of disability have been vitally important for persons with disabilities, both personally and politically. The social model uncovered the strong moral position that gave the disability movement its political strength and empowered individual persons with disabilities to take charge of their own lives (C. Thomas, 2007). Besides, they have fostered the development of disability studies as an academic discipline and have helped ensure a long-overdue place for disability on the sociological and political agenda.

With reference to the Islamic view of disability, Muslims have been guided by the Quran and Hadith on the noble and fair approaches to persons with disabilities. Unfortunately, this teaching of Islam is not echoed in the current situation which reflects little concern granted to disability issues in Muslim communities.

The following chapter turns to look at the experience of persons with disabilities in the labour market, focusing on the barriers to employment, career choices and options provided for them to secure their participation in the community. It also attempts to highlight the experience of persons with learning difficulties in supported employment with reference to the literature.

CHAPTER 4

UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF PERSONS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES IN THE LABOUR MARKET

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter explores significant models of disability which contribute to the understanding of the experiences of persons with disabilities including in the labour market. It is apparent that the growing commitment to the social model of disability is reflected in policies which aim to increase the inclusion of persons with disabilities in areas such as education, training and employment. Proponents of the disability movements and the social model of disability have been influential in raising expectations of what should be possible for persons with disabilities and what they have a right to expect.

However, existing policies and practice often continue to centre on an individualised approach which focuses primarily on the characteristics of the persons with disabilities, including their impairments which are often viewed in a negative light (Shier *et al.*, 2009). This conception is apparent for example, in relation to the binary distinction between 'able to work' and 'not able to work' which continues to be applied to people with disabilities in Malaysia. As a result, it would appear that persons with disabilities continue to face difficulties in convincing others of their potential abilities and of having similar expectations to their non-disabled peers in relation to enjoying meaningful lives.

This chapter will review what is known about the experiences of persons with learning difficulties in relation to accessing the labour market by focusing on

three main issues. Firstly, it will try to establish why the right to a working life and having a career in paid work are seen to be a crucial matter for everyone in general and for persons with disabilities in particular. In order to understand this, the theoretical understanding of career and career development which emphasise the complex relationship between the individual, systems and contexts will be discussed. Secondly, the chapter will explore how we could understand the experience of persons with disabilities regarding the barriers faced in accessing a working life and developing their career in paid jobs. Finally, the chapter will focus on persons with learning difficulties, looking at the measures taken in encouraging their participation in the labour market, particularly in supported employment.

4.2 RIGHTS TO WORKING LIFE AND A CAREER IN PAID JOBS

It is generally well accepted that every individual has the right to aspire to a working life, a right that is enshrined in Article 23 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights:

Everyone has a right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment. Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work. Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.

(United Nations, n.d.)

This Article not only emphasises the right to work as a whole, but also the working conditions which everyone should be able to expect. It stresses the right to the free choice, the just and favourable conditions of work and

remuneration, equal pay for equal work and also social protection. In this regard, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that the right to work should not only mean to gain a job but the job should be also rewarding, in both financial and psychological terms.

4.2.1 The Importance and Benefits of a Working Life

A range of research and other literature has explored the importance of work in the lives of individuals and the key elements from which they derive satisfaction. Quintanilla & Wilpert, (1991) list 11 work goals and values that individuals rate their importance differently:

- Good pay,
- Interesting work,
- Good job security,
- Opportunity to learn,
- Good interpersonal relations,
- A lot of variety,
- A good match between the worker and the job,
- Good opportunity for upgrading or promotion,
- Job autonomy,
- Convenient work hour, and
- Good physical working conditions.

It is not unreasonable to assume that these elements are as important to disabled people as to other citizens.

Much of the literature on employment in relation to the general population has highlighted three inter-related benefits of employment: it offers an opportunity for economic independence, encourages social participation in the community and increases the self-image of an individual in terms of self-confidence and self-esteem (Baker *et al.*, 2003; Brief & Nord, 1990).

Research on disabled people also shows that these perceived economic, social and personal benefits apply to them in a similar way.

The association between unemployment and poverty (Ernst & Berg, 2009; Shakespeare & Officer, 2011) as well as poverty and disability (Grech, 2009; Nagata, 2007; Shakespeare & Officer, 2011) is frequently reported and is regarded as a major issue which needs to be tackled in all countries. Among other things, the costs of living with disability are high and people with disabilities often require more substantial finance (The World Bank, 2007). Therefore, having a paid job can therefore prove crucial to them as a route out of poverty. Thus, with a reasonable income, dependency on families and others for economic support can be reduced and people with disabilities can establish their financial independence (Danieli & Wheeler, 2006).

Studies have also emphasized that employment offers more than financial rewards (Beyer *et al.*, 2005). It also offers social benefits which include opportunities to form social relationships (Chadsey & Beyer, 2001; Wistow & Schneider, 2003) and develop social skills (Wistow & Schneider, 2003).

Work also *'gives people the sense of participating in a wider collective purpose; and it provides the individual with social status and a sense of identity'* (Jahoda cited in Barnes *et al.*, 1998:9). Social opportunities derived from working may in turn increase their levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction (Jahoda *et al.*, 2008; Jahoda *et al.*, 2009; Jenkins, 2002)

Moreover, employment has also been found to benefit the well-being of the individual in other ways. In cultures which place a high emphasis on working

being economically active allows an individual to prove their abilities and increase their value in society (Acton, 1981; Jenkins, 2002). It is clear that certain persons with disabilities who are unable to work due to their impairments or because of discrimination by society are judged as unable to achieve the principal standards of behaviour in society. The person may be perceived by others as being inadequate and incomplete which in turn may lower their self-esteem (Acton, 1981; Burchardt, 2005). Thus, in contemporary society, work is viewed as one of the fundamental needs to develop and enrich life to increase the human dignity as other citizens.

Attention has also been drawn to other direct, personal benefits which individuals frequently derive from being involved in paid employment. Employment can give a regular structure and discipline to daily living. Depending on the work situation, it may also offer the opportunity of being involved with something they are interested in as well as mixing with other people. This has been seen to afford the chance of better life satisfaction (Acton, 1981; Flores *et al.*, 2011). Studies also show that depression is greater for people who experience no challenging tasks to be performed (Dutta *et al.*, 2008; The World Bank, 2007). Dutta and colleagues (2008) in their research on persons with disabilities in the United States report that unemployed people tend to use alcohol more often, and report lower scores on self-esteem and quality of life measures. While for those with a permanent disability who are unable to undertake employment, they might grieve, feel bored, or experience loneliness (The World Bank, 2007).

The motivation to participate in the labour market and the benefits derived from it can be understood in terms of Maslow's theory of motivation. Maslow believes that satisfying the basic 'deficiency needs' (Maslow, 1943: 371) - physiological, safety, social, esteem - is needed to lead to a meaningful life, both socially and economically. In relation to economic security, McClelland's Three Needs Theory (Rosmawati Sulaiman, 2008) stresses the importance of financial rewards derived from work in enhancing the wellbeing of an individual.

Likewise, in 2001, Juan Somavia, ILO Director General, stated his view of the importance of employment:

Every day we are reminded that, for everybody, work is a defining feature of human existence. It is the mean of sustaining life and of meeting basic needs. But it is also an activity through which individuals affirm their own identity, both to themselves and to those around them. It is crucial to individual choice, to the welfare of families and to the stability of societies. (Bill et al., 2004: 2)

Considering the importance of work or career in one's life, this raises questions about what is actually meant by a 'career'. The following section will illustrate the definition of career and theories involved in career development.

4.2.2 Understanding the meaning of career

There are numerous studies in the academic literature relating to careers which have constructed various definitions of career and ways of theorising about it. While a review of existing career definitions, theories and frameworks is not within the scope of this study, a brief outline is provided to

enhance the understanding of the experience of persons with disabilities in relation to their working lives.

Career was previously defined as an occupation associated with a contractual employment which offers an exchange of worker loyalty for the firm's implicit promise of job security with opportunities for promotion and increases of salary (Hall, 1996). This perspective on career was later broadened by incorporating almost all life activities including life roles, leisure activities, learning and work, throughout a lifespan, and no longer limited to occupation (Sullivan and Baruch, 2009). Researchers such as McDaniels, integrates leisure activities into the definition of career (McDaniels, 1965 cited in Nor Wahiza Abdul Wahat, 2011)) and Sullivan and Baruch (2009) recognise the physical movements, personal interpretations, career alternatives and outcomes which create a special pattern of one's lifetime. Thus, it is possible to conclude that career is now viewed in a broader and more diverse way, not only as between employer and employee but also including the complex contexts and systems surrounding an employment.

Career theory started with the vocational awareness which develops a path to career choice. Since career is dealing with one's life, "an individual's career is suggested to be influenced by many contextual factors, such as national culture, the economy and the political environment as well as by personal factors, such as relationships with others" (Sullivan and Baruch, 2009: 1543). This career awareness is shaped by the development process of an individual through his or her childhood experience which is through

observation of family members or role models which would affect and stimulate an interest in certain future careers (Neff, 1968 cited in Chubon, 1985).

Historically, career theories have evolved in parallel to the need and scenario of the environment. Referring to the timeline of career theories and models outlined by Careers New Zealand (2012), Frank Parsons with *the talent-matching approach* is regarded as the founder of the vocational guidance movement in early 1900s. *Holland's theory of person-environment fit* was then followed with the assumption that an individual has to be fit first to the work and environment before placing them in an employment. Later, theories started to grow with the initiative of the developmental theory of Ginzberg and associates, Tiedman, Super, Gottfredson and Roe in the 1950s. This theory proposes the importance of a developmental path to lead to career choice (Careers New Zealand, 2012).

Following this, the *person-centred theory* focused on the relationship between the helper and client. The late 1970s to 1990s saw the emphasis of theories on the individual via, for example, the unique learning experiences in social learning theory, the individual experience in post-modern theory, the way individuals code thinking, language and behaviour in neuro-linguistic programming theory, the chance events in happenstance theory, separation from problems in narrative therapy theory and balancing the spiritual, thoughts, physical and family dimensions in Te Whare Tapa Wa theory. And lately, in the 2000s, *the theory of coaching* was introduced by which regular

coaching session are offered to foster the career development (Careers New Zealand, 2012). It could perhaps be concluded that the development of career theories has been related to environmental and social changes.

Despite numerous career theories and models introduced to suit with these changes it is claimed that no single one is sufficient to describe the broad field of career development (Chuban, 1985; Sullivan and Baruch, 2009).

Moreover, Sullivan and Baruch (2009) highlight that most of previous career studies were undertaken in Western countries and there has been a lack of attention to particular groups of the diverse workforce, such as persons with disabilities and the minorities.

4.2.3 Career development for persons with disabilities

Regardless of the dearth of empirical research relating to career development for persons with disabilities, the existing career theories *appear* to be quite straightforward and applicable to many areas of employment such as the issue of access to employment, obstacles and opportunities which affect the chances of joining the labour market. Comparing the career development theories with disability models, one can see a connection between that the traditional theory of person-environment fit (Careers New Zealand, 2012) and the rehabilitative perspective in the individual model of disability (Oliver, 1990) for persons with disabilities. In addition, the current coaching theory (Careers New Zealand, 2012) seems to correspond with the coaching practices in supported employment (Beyer & Robinson, 2009) which apply the tenets of social model of disability (Oliver, 1990).

However, there are debates among scholars regarding the applicability of the general theory to persons with disabilities (Beveridge *et al.*, 2002). It is argued that there is a scarcity of career theories which deliberate on the vocational and career development among persons with disabilities (Conte, 1983 cited in Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2012). Although Super (1981) mentions the consequence of flaws in career development theory in relation to persons with disabilities, he only covers the complications facing persons with disabilities in their career development in the absence of any encouraging support. As a result, the vocational awareness claimed was largely built on assumptions since no empirical research had been done regarding career development for persons with disabilities (Chubon, 1985).

Referring to the unsuitability of the general theories to persons with disabilities, three factors were specified concerning disability-related problems in the lives of persons with disabilities which cause the existing theories not to be applicable to them: (a) restrictions on exploration experience in the early career, (b) slim chances to build up decision-making skills, and (c) a negative self-concept due to public attitudes toward persons with disabilities (Conte (1983) and Curnow (1989) cited in Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2012). These problems will be discuss in the later part of the chapter.

Doubting the applicability of general career theories and acknowledging these disability-related problems, Beveridge *et al.*, (2002) adapted a previous career framework and proposed the INCOME model which

suggests six stages of career development: **Imagining**, **Informing**, **Choosing**, **Obtaining**, **Maintaining** and **Exiting**. This was intended as a guide for counselling practice not only for persons with disabilities but also for other non-disabled people, either minorities or majorities, and for both genders.

However, to employ this framework for persons with disabilities, it is suggested that each stage should be discussed separately within those with pre-career-onset disabilities, those with mid-career-onset disabilities and those with episodic disabilities since they experience different career development processes (see Beveridge *et al.*, 2002 for details).

These six stages start with *imagining* in which the individual realises the existence of occupations, works, jobs, or career. This realisation involves three sub-statuses: awareness, fantasy and reality-based imagining through observations rooted since early childhood. This early exposure develops values and concepts of work which influence the second stage of *informing* by which a complex of individual, environmental and cultural characteristics are acquired. The interaction of these two stages then affects the third stage of *choosing* a suitable job to match. At this stage, the individual decision-making style significantly shape this status.

The fourth stage of *obtaining* implements the career decision and involves gaining a job. Persons with disabilities face several additional barriers to obtain employment. These include the economic environment, the person's family situation, cultural and societal attitudes towards them and unfriendly accessibility. Therefore, this stage seems principally complicated for persons

with disabilities. After attaining the job, the next stage involves *maintaining* which is to familiarise, perform and maintain a career. The last stage of *exiting* involves not only leaving the current vocational situation but also being promoted or entering a new work setting for career development. Work satisfaction and work goals determine this final stage.

As mentioned earlier, changes in environmental and social factors have a high impact on career development. Therefore, it is important to ensure that people with disabilities are up-to-date with current scenarios by which career education, guidance and counseling are thoroughly addressed to the advancement of their careers in a positive way.

4.3 PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AND ACCESS TO WORKING LIFE

Given that employment makes an important contribution to quality of life; a case has been made as we have seen that persons with disabilities should not be precluded from having comparable desires and aspirations to those in the general population in relation to a working life. However, it is argued that there is no clear path to lead them to a particular profession or occupation (Roggero *et al.*, 2006). They are, however, frequently considered to have limited ability or skill and therefore, restricted career chances (Adams & Oldfield, 2012). Accordingly, they face extraordinary challenges in making a successful transition into the major arenas of employment (Beveridge *et al.*, 2002).

In understanding these challenges, it is important to consider the psychologically based theoretical reasons for negative and positive bias in

dealing with persons with disabilities (Colella & Bruyere, 2011; Dipboye & Colella, 2005; Stone & Colella, 2011). Arguably, persons with disabilities are found to be subject to discrimination since disability is always depicted in a pessimistic sense.

4.3.1 Employment trends among persons with disabilities

It has been reported that 80 per cent of persons with disabilities are unemployed and live on low-incomes in many developing countries (International Labour Office, 2003: 34). In addition, the wage gap between persons with and without disabilities in the UK is approximately 40 per cent (Meager & Hill, 2005). The difference in employment opportunities between people with and without disabilities also gives rise to substantial concern (Jones, 2008). With only 48 per cent of the employment rate for persons with disabilities compared to 81 per cent for persons without disabilities in the UK (Smith & Twomey, 2002), it is logical to conclude that disability has a negative effect on an individual's labour market prospects and leads to discrimination at work (M. Jones, Latreile, & Sloane, 2006).

The suppression of this issue of discrimination at work is in fact emphasised in the ILO's Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111). Discrimination at work basically refers to a different treatment given to an individual depending on personal characteristics. This issue of lower economic participation and a substantial wage gap between persons with and without disabilities has been the subject of considerable research and debate (Faridah Serajul Haq, 2003; Jones *et al.*, 2006; Tomei, 2003).

Findings from the Labour Force Survey of Spring 2005 in the UK suggested a serious discrimination at work against older disabled people (Meager & Hill, 2005). The scenario worsens further for persons with learning difficulties. Li *et al.* (2004) found that 50 per cent of their respondents with learning difficulties in the UK experience discrimination by employers in joining the workforce and in relation to their wages. Such findings emerge in Canada and the United States (Burge *et al.*, 2007; Migliore *et al.*, 2008). Workplace discrimination has been observed mainly in job processes such as human resource selection, job interviews, appointments, performance appraisal and promotions (Ozgener, 2007).

A considerable amount of research has also focused on access to working life. Studies show that persons with disabilities have greater difficulty in accessing employment than do those without disabilities (Molloy *et al.*, 2003) even when they are suitably qualified, want to work, and are able to work (Colella & Bruyere, 2011). Not only do they have less chance to work, but if they work, they are likely to be in more unstable, lower paid and lower level occupations than persons without disabilities (Deal, 2007; Rigg, 2005). They are also likely to have fewer opportunities for promotion (Migliore *et al.*, 2008). Studies of employment status and outcomes over the past two decades also revealed that persons with learning difficulties are less likely to be working than people with other types of impairments and, when employed, are likely to earn less (Olney and Kennedy, 2001).

Relatively little research has been conducted on the experiences of persons with disabilities during the process of recruitment or in the workplace once they are employed. Those studies that have been carried out suggest that disabled employees continue to face difficulties once they get into work. For instance, Paetzold *et al.*, (2008) found that non-disabled people were unlikely to work with or have any interaction with persons with disabilities in a work context. In addition, employees with disabilities are less likely to receive informal training from co-workers and are not regarded as a member of a team. These can be seen as indicators of their exclusion in the context of the workplace (Schur *et al.*, 2009). Fevre *et al.* (2008) also found from their UK workplace survey that employees with disabilities are more likely to experience bullying and harassment in the workplace than any other minority group.

Acknowledging these circumstances, it would be sensible to assume that their aspirations to join the workforce are severely hampered by the multitude of barriers (Barnes *et al.*, 1999; Migliore *et al.*, 2008). The nature of these barriers will be discussed in the next section.

4.3.2 Barriers to employment for persons with disabilities

For a range of groups of people who have had limited access to employment, there are two types of barriers which inhibit their employment, development, retention, and promotion: individual and organisational (Wentling *et al.*, 1997).

Individual barriers

The individual types of barrier relate to the low level of education and training (Burge *et al.*, 2007; Migliore *et al.*, 2008; Yeo, 2007); and self-development of the individual. In addition to poor general education and training, individuals may experience poor career planning, inadequate skill preparation and low self-esteem.

These barriers are relevant to the experience of disabled people and are linked to the factors which influence their career development as discussed in Section 4.2.3. It is argued that persons with disabilities experience career awareness disturbance as they have restricted career options (Boxall, 2010; Goldstone & Meager, 2002; Harrington, 2003) and a lack of role models or mentors (Osipow, 1983) to inspire them. In addition, they have inadequate guidance in relation to their career development (Wentling *et al.* (1997). As a result, they are more likely to make restricted or unwise career decisions without the opportunity to consider a full range of alternatives or develop a sound career strategy. Moreover, for persons with learning difficulties, there is widespread agreement that their career aspirations or career prospects are dependent on brief judgements made by the employment service (Moore, 2004).

Secondly, it is argued that persons with disabilities may not have sufficient or appropriate skills related to employment or independence (Burge *et al.*, 2007). Studies in the US have found that since they have had inadequate skill preparation and a low level of education, persons with disabilities tend to

be offered low-skill jobs with less autonomy and decision making (Special Education Division, 2008) as well as basic jobs that require less education (Schur *et al.*, 2009) and have poorer promotion chances (Colella and Bruyere, 2011).

Moreover, some research in Africa confirms that where people with learning difficulties have difficulty conforming to some aspects of an organisation's culture, they will be inhibited from competing with other workers (Wentling *et al.*, 1997). It is obvious for persons with learning difficulties that their low levels of education give them fewer chances to join the labour market. In the US, for example, only 37 per cent continue to 'postsecondary education' (Zafft *et al.*, 2004). Those who have a higher level of education are reported to be more likely to be placed in a job with higher wages and they typically stay in the position longer (Cimera, 2008; Gilmore *et al.*, 2001). This similar scenario of education drop-out happens in Malaysia (Special Education Division, 2008) since the percentage of those continuing to the secondary school is very low.

Thirdly, parents or guardians can also restrict their children's exposure to the world of work especially for those with learning difficulties (Hart *et al.*, 2007). This protectiveness and circumstances of dependency can lead to poor self-image and social immaturity, particularly with regard to decision-making and problem-solving (Chubon, 1985). Consequently, they are seen to have relatively limited ability and low self-esteem (Bowe, 1978 in Chubon, 1985). While for persons with learning difficulties, the diagnosis of their impairments

plays an important role in determining their job opportunities. For instance, those with the label of 'behavioral challenges' tend to have poorer employment outcomes (Mank et al. 2003).

Organisational barriers

There is now a range of UK and US empirical work on the factors in the workplace which have an impact on discrimination within the workforce as a whole or in specific jobs. Within these literatures (Croteau, 1996; Hebl, 2002; Stofberg, 2007) key issues can be identified and these include: the attitudes and behaviours of employers towards disabled workers, lack of understanding among employers of persons with disabilities and their need and abilities, and working practices which may discriminate directly or indirectly.

One of the greatest barriers against employment opportunities for persons with disabilities is believed to be generated by unfavourable attitudes among employers (Barnes *et al.* 1998). It appears that most employers show superficial acceptance of disabled workers but this is not translated into a commitment to employ them (Scheid, 1999). Research has indicated that employers frequently associate disability with potential performance problems, high accommodation costs, difficulty in supervising and behavioural or attitudinal problems (Millington *et al.*, 2003).

Further, studies indicate that there is not only a lack of expertise among employers in the UK about how to perform the job selection process for disabled applicants but also a lack of awareness about any assistance for

this that is available from the relevant public and private agencies (Rogan *et al.*, 2003; Stensrud and Gilbride, 2003). Recent studies in the UK also show that the “misconceptions about their abilities” (International Labour Office, 2003: 34) and lack of awareness among employers and the society of their needs and abilities (Vasoo, 1997; Abidin, 1999) limit the opportunities for persons with disabilities to work.

Even if they are employed, they are commonly placed in stereotypical occupational tracks (Mank, 1998). Moreover, comprehensively, however, is the notion of their *workability*; this refers to the concept introduced by Juhani Ilmarinen in 1981 (Ilmarinen, 2003) which seeks to answer the question:

“How good is the worker at present and in the near future, and how able is he/she to do his/her work with respect to work demands, health, and mental resources?”

(Ilmarinen, 2003, p. 4)

A more rounded perspective is helpful for persons with learning difficulties as they are usually assumed to be only suitable to work in a specialised setting - rather than one which draws on the kind of integrated workplace which can create workability for them (Visier, 1998). For those joining supported employment, they are regarded as having a moderate level of disabilities: as reported in the US. 93 per cent of those in supported employment had mild or moderate developmental disabilities and only 7 per cent had severe developmental disabilities (Mank, 1998). The career prospects for those with learning difficulties have been limited to certain areas of employment (Purvis *et al.*, 2006; Thornton & Lunt, 1997). Studies involving both Western and

Eastern countries strengthened the assumption since they are usually placed in the food service occupations or positions in retail and assembly or manufacturing (Norani Mohd Salleh *et al.*, 2001; Purvis *et al.*, 2006; Yeo, 2007).

Furthermore, employees with disabilities can be subject to a rather confusing treatment compared to other employees in terms of their performance expectations. There is preferential treatment for some disabled employees but there is also evidence of less favourable treatment. People usually hold lower performance expectations such that the employees with disabilities would be rewarded for performing better than expectations rather than for his or her level of performance (Colella *et al.* 1997). Whereas, sometimes, people would give positive treatment or outcomes (Colella *et al.*, 1997; Colella *et al.*, 1998; Dipboye & Colella, 2005 and Stone & Colella, 1996) though this group of employees have poor performance. This can lead to unrealistic feedback, fewer growth opportunities in terms of training and challenging job assignments (Colella and Varma, 1999). Although this unfairness is illustrated in American studies and conducted in the mid-1990s, it is likely that this prejudice is relevant to more recent periods and in other places.

4.4 EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT FOR PERSONS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

ILO Recommendation No. 168 (International Labour Office, 2008) suggests that persons with disabilities should enjoy equality of opportunity and

treatment in respect of access to, retention of and advancement in employment which corresponds to their own choice and takes account of their individual suitability for such employment. Holding on the notion of the Convention, the Malaysian Government proposes tackling the systemic barriers preventing this group from participating fully in employment (Jayasooria *et al.*, 1997). Policies and legislations are also introduced and enhanced to promote more employment opportunities for persons with disabilities (Social Welfare Department Malaysia, 2009). In addition, the need to fulfil corporate social responsibilities among the employers is also addressed by the government (Harlida Abdul Wahab, 2011) while the disability movements have tried a myriad of approaches to enhance the economic participation of their members (Yeo, 2007).

Unfortunately, despite these efforts to include persons with disabilities in the economic mainstream, unemployment rates among persons with disabilities are still exceptionally high in Malaysia (Faridah Serajul Haq, 2003). A similar situation could be seen in other countries such as in the US (Bound & Burkhauser, 1999) and in the UK (Jones *et al.*, 2006). In addition, the changing global markets in Malaysia due to the high rates of foreign workforce, the variation of the birth rates and the increase of life expectancy offers a more competitive diverse workforce to the labour market (Faridah Serajul Haq, 2003). Accordingly, the participation rate of persons with disabilities in the open labour market still tends to be considerably lower than that of other workers, while the unemployment rate tends to be higher (Norani Mohd Salleh *et al.*, 2001). As mentioned earlier, this scenario is

more damaging for persons with learning difficulties (Department of Health, 2011; Goodley & Norouzi, 2005).

As stated in Chapter 1, persons with learning difficulties may be defined as those who have limitations in their ability to understand, learn and cope with new or complex information or skills (Department of Health, 2001). Due to others' perceptions of their incompetence, maladaptive functioning and low intelligence (Goodley & Norouzi, 2005), there are considerable barriers for persons with learning difficulties to compete on equal terms with other workers in the open labour market (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000). Thus, it is believed that a particular approach, related to their needs and circumstances is needed to uphold the equality of opportunity to work for this group.

Sheltered employment which encompasses the rehabilitative and vocational approach was generally introduced in Malaysia in the late 1990 (Jayasooria, 2000) to provide occupational activities for them parallel to the ILO Recommendation No. 168 (International Labour Office, 2008) as well as the UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in their forty-eighth session in 1993. The standard rules stated that governments should *“support the establishment of various types of sheltered employment as an alternative for persons with disabilities for whom access to open employment is not practicable”* (United Nations, 1993).

It is a global practice that sheltered employment is commonly operated in a sheltered workshop with a structured environment where persons with

disabilities receive training from persons without disabilities (Kregel J & Dean, 2002) and work on jobs which require relatively low skills (Gottlieb *et al.*, 2010). Such sheltered workshops often required heavy subsidies from the public funds in order to meet costs of maintenance and operational losses (Kregel and Dean, 2002) since they are usually managed by non-governmental organisations. However, this old concept of subsidised work for specific groups of persons with disabilities is progressively changing from being within a sheltered context to operating more substantial schemes of production. These production scheme workshops put emphasis on producing a much wider variety of marketable goods which are operated on commercial lines and produced by many categories of persons with disabilities.

Regardless of this new development, sheltered employment was still criticised for salaries paid at usually less than the minimum wage (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000). As a result, the individuals remain dependent on government cash benefits (Gottlieb *et al.*, 2010). Moreover, persons with disabilities are segregated in isolated work environments which lead to low expectations and negative perceptions among the wider society (Murphy and Rogan, 1995). Despite these perceived weaknesses, sheltered employment still operates to cater for those who fail to gain access to the labour market. There is also, in principle, the possibility that they might facilitate transition to the open labour market. However, research findings suggest that very few people are successfully enabled to enter mainstream employment after working in sheltered employment (Gottlieb *et al.*, 2010).

In order to support equal employment opportunities, the ILO and UN Conventions have also marked a transition in approaches to support equal opportunities for persons with disabilities. It is increasingly argued that instead of considering persons with disabilities as a “welfare” responsibility; people who are constantly in need of assistance based on the individual model of disability (Mohd Salleh *et al.*, 2001), they have been seen as productive persons who can contribute to the nation (ILO, 1983; United Nations, 2006). Using the lens of the social model of disability, greater emphasis is placed on physical and social barriers as restrictions to equal employment opportunities (Jayasooria & Ooi, 1994; Norani Mohd Salleh *et al.*, 2001; Oliver, 2009).

In an effort to increase the participation of persons with learning difficulties in open, competitive employment, several measures have been adopted and implemented internationally and nationally to potentially increase their participation. These measures include integrate persons with disabilities into training and employment services such as work trial or on-job-training (Migliore *et al.*, 2007; Wilson, 2003) which provides experience in or tests suitability for a particular job. The purpose of this work trial is to provide persons with disabilities opportunities to perform a job in an open employment setting as well as provide an employer with the opportunity to observe their performance before deciding on any recruitment. During the course of the placement, support from job coaches is provided to assist both employees and employers. This approach is part of supported employment.

4.4.1 What is supported employment?

Supported employment was initiated in 1986 in the United States as an alternative to traditional rehabilitation or sheltered programmes for persons who were defined as having severe disabilities (Wehman & Revell, 1996). The principles and assumptions of supported employment are based on the initial work of Gold (1972) and Brown and Pearce (1970) cited in Wehman & Revell, (1996) who demonstrated that persons with severe disabilities could learn to perform complex, vocationally relevant tasks. These principles were coupled with increased acceptance of the principle of normalisation (Wolfensberger, 1972) that led to greater expectations for persons with disabilities to integrate with disabled persons in work settings.

Assuming that every individual should have the right to work in a community, supported employment was introduced as an attempt to tailor the support services according to the need and capabilities of persons who are labelled as severely disabled (Lutfiyya *et al.*, 1988). This assumption is consistent with social model of disability as described by William (2009) to be:

'someone who has been labelled as having difficulties in cognitive understanding, but is someone with rights, including the right to maximum control over decisions that affect them, and who may need help and support to claim and exercise those rights.'

(William, 2009: 7)

According to this description, it has been suggested that special support is needed to cater for their incapacity to easily understand and learn new things independently. Therefore, support from job coaches to provide specialised

on-site training, assist to perform the job and adjust to the work environment are regarded as one crucial intervention to help them to be economically active. It is also believed that “with authentic instruction and reasonable long-term and personalised support,” (Brown *et al.*, 2006: 119) they will have a better chance to live independently with their own incomes (Jenaro *et al.*, 2002).

Supported employment was first defined as a paid work in a range of situations which mostly use work settings specially designed for persons with disabilities who are very unlikely to join competitive employment and who are in need of intensive, on-going support to perform in a work setting (Albin, 1992). It does not focus on the development of prerequisite skills prior to job placement nor does it direct efforts only to those individuals who are deemed ready for a job but rather suggests that the important elements to job success are the provision of necessary on-site job accommodation, training and support (Lutfiyya *et al.*, 1988). It is a “place-train”, rather than a “train-place” model (Ogawa, 2011).

Over time the definition of supported employment has changed. However the characteristics across all definitions are: integration, paid employment, individualized services and on-going support (Callahan, 1986; Wehman *et al.*, 1992).

Supported employment is provided through different modalities- individualised placement, enclave and mobile work crew- depending upon the specific work site demands and the characteristics of the persons who

are expected to perform the tasks (Brolin, 1995; Wehmen and Kregel, 1990). The most common modality is that of **individualised placement** where one person is supported into the open labour market and is provided with on-going on-site support. More than 50 per cent of all supported employment placements in the United States are generally of an individualised placement modality (Becker & Drake, 2003).

Another modality of the supported employment model is the **enclave**. An enclave comprises a group of individuals with disabilities who are responsible for one job. This job is sub-divided into tasks and distributed amongst the individual group members. An enclave may consist, typically, of three to five persons with disabilities who are responsible as a group for one overall job. The collective effort of all of the enclave members produces the result expected by the employer concerning completion of the job (Brolin, 1995; Wehmen and Kregel, 1990).

A third modality is that of the **mobile work crew** which is also a group or collective entity of persons with disabilities who perform a job in different settings many times on different days. Mobile work crews are frequently involved in lawn or grounds maintenance activities where they work at a different site every day. The job is also sub-divided into different tasks which are assigned to different mobile crew members. The mobile work crew works under the supervision of a job coach who ensures that all crew members perform his or her respective duties or responsibilities (Brolin, 1995; Wehmen and Kregel, 1990).

The supported employment model comprises several common phases: job preparation, job development, job placement, job training, follow up and follow along services and promotion and service evaluation. In job preparation, the individual's skills and interests are firstly identified and vocational guidance and orientation given. Simultaneously, labour market needs are also identified to suit the employability skills of the individual. Later on, the process of marketing and job matching are involved in job development. After successfully getting a placement, the job trainer starts to prepare necessary arrangements to introduce the trainee to the work environment and responsibilities (Winstow and Schneider, 2003).

The next stage of job training involves training the employee to fulfil the job. After that, on-going supports is given periodically where necessary to maintain the employee's confidence and capacity to continue in the workplace. There is then a tailing off period of support when the employee seems to be adapting well to the environment. Lastly, this initiative of supported employment is promoted amongst family members and communities to ensure better implementation.

4.4.2 Supported employment and persons with learning difficulties

There is an entire field of work that suggests that supported employment is the most effective and research-based practice for persons with learning difficulties (Bond, 2004; Bond *et al*, 2001; Evans and Bond, 2008; Frey *et al.*, 2008; Nuechterlein *et al.*, 2008). Many studies in the minority world have claimed that supported employment has significant influence in improving the

inclusion of persons with learning difficulties into competitive employment in the community (Drake *et al.*, 1994, Bass *et al.*, 1996).

Research on supported employment (Bond *et al.*, 1997; 2001, Anthony, 2008) has suggested that the employment rate for persons with learning difficulties could increase approximately from 15 to 45 per cent with the utilisation of supported employment (Anthony *et al.*, 2002, Bond, 2004). Moreover, the provisions of on-going support services for persons with disabilities in supported employment significantly increase the rates of employment retention (Hemmings & Morris, 2004). Similarly, Beyer and Robinson (2009) conclude that supported employment makes a significant contribution to improving the employment rates among persons with difficulties but draw attention to the fact that it is most practised among persons with mild to borderline learning difficulties (Beyer and Robinson, 2009).

Given this high degree of employment participation for persons with learning difficulties, supported employment has become an attractive approach among service providers. Even though most of the job placements are in unskilled, entry-level jobs (Bond *et al.*, 1997), at least they are not excluded from the world of work. In view of that, many studies show the preference for and applicability of supported employment compared to other options of employment for persons with learning difficulties. Migliore *et al.* (2007) for instance verified that most persons with learning difficulties as well as their families and workshop staffs seem to prefer supported employment than

sheltered employment. Similarly, Burns *et al.* (2007) who compared the supported employment “place and train” model to other vocational rehabilitation models across six European countries found that: (a) supported employment participants were expected to gain employment; (b) the total cost of the supported employment model “place and train” was less than traditional “train and place” models; and (c) individuals who had previous work experience had better job retention rates.

In addition, a study conducted by the United States Department of Health and Human Services (2001) has shown that supported employment with the support of job coaches in the workplace, plays a vital role in convincing persons with learning difficulties, as well as the employers, about the possibility of participation in the workforce. Similarly, Brown, Shiraga and Kessler (2006) in their study of 20-year personal and employment histories of 50 individuals with learning disabilities indicate that persons with learning difficulties have participated in most of the supported work settings and performed more than 150 different meaningful jobs.

Since it is recognised that providing appropriate levels of support is an important feature of the supported employment model, Jenaro *et al.* (2002) analysed the relationship between forms of support and outcomes in supported employment across Australia, Germany and the United Kingdom. They found that (a) less natural support strategies during the entry process correspond to less typical job outcomes; (b) more typical interventions during the job development process correspond to better social, economic and

performance outcomes; and (c) economic, social and performance outcomes are strongly encouraged. Thus, it could be understood that support assistance is vital in determining the success of supported employment as well as maintaining the participation of the recipients in the scheme.

In addition, employers who hire supported employees expressed broadly positive attitudes towards supported employment workers. They confirmed the dedication of supported employment workers and agreed that the quality of their work was equal or superior to that of other workers (Jenaro *et al.*, 2002, Stofberg, 2007). Moreover, Burge *et al.* (2007) also indicated that 87 per cent of individuals with intellectual disabilities in Ontario believed that the image of the workplace would not be tarnished by employing disabled people.

Most of the research discussed provides empirical findings in the context of the minority world since supported employment has been implemented to a much greater extent in those countries. There is little research yet on Malaysia or other majority world countries. Given the positive impacts of supported employment on the rise of employment rates and the lives of persons with learning difficulties, in other contexts, it is essential to understand as much as possible about the recent Malaysian experience. That is the purpose of this thesis.

4.5 CONCLUSION

As the literature makes clear, every single person, including persons with disabilities, has the right to work since employment being important

economic, social and personal benefits to one's life. However, persons with disabilities apparently have vague career aspirations and this contributes to the poor development of their working life. This chapter describes their employment situations concentrating on barriers to employment faced by persons with disabilities and persons with learning difficulties in particular. The discussion reviews previous findings relating to the experiences of persons with learning difficulties in supported employment and considers measures which were believed to enhance the participation of persons with learning difficulties in meaningful employment.

CHAPTER 5

METHODOLOGY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This study aims to produce key insights into the 'lived realities' of employees with learning difficulties taking part in a supported employment scheme. It foregrounds their perceptions but also explores those of government officials, managers and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) coordinators involved in the development of policy and practice relating to the scheme.

Four research questions were addressed to achieve these aims as stated in Chapter 1:

1. To what extent persons with learning difficulties are capable to join supported employment?
2. What are the factors that influence the emergence of supported employment in Malaysia?
3. How has supported employment for persons with learning difficulties been implemented?
4. How has supported employment affected the lives of persons with learning difficulties?

This chapter gives a detailed account of the approach taken to the empirical research, its processes and its rationale. The research paradigm will be firstly described before the common issues related to the research process: research design, data collection and data analysis are presented. Finally, issues of trustworthiness will also be discussed.

5.2 RESEARCH PARADIGMS

This section discusses debates on the philosophical assumptions of positivism, interpretivism, participatory and emancipatory research in the disability field to firstly understand the changing approach in this area of research. Later, the discussion continues on the selection of methodology for the study.

5.2.1 The debates in disability studies

Initially, within Disability Studies and the Disabled Peoples' Movements there was substantial concern about having a positivist or interpretivist approach to disability research. Prior to the growth of Disability Studies in the 1980s, most disability research had had its roots in medicine or medically-related disciplines and had adopted quantitative and approaches within a positivist paradigm (Hammersley, 1995).

Research within that tradition was seen to understand disability in a particular set of ways which began to be challenged by disabled academics and activists (Danieli & Woodhams, 2005; Oliver, 1988). Research within this positivist paradigm was criticised for increasing oppression towards persons with disabilities (E. Stone & Priestley, 1996) on the basis of its ontological assumptions of an individualistic medical model of disability and because it was construed as seeing persons with disabilities as research objects (Turmusani, 2004). In terms of epistemological frameworks, positivism was challenged on the grounds that it understood disability from the view of non-disabled researchers and was not linked to disabled persons' experience and

understanding of disability (Danieli & Woodhams, 2005). In addition, positivists were also criticised for their failure to bring about change including positive policy outcomes for persons with disabilities (Oliver, 1992).

Critiques of positivism were already common among sociologists who developed interpretive research paradigms that recognise the subjective nature of the social world and questioned whether it could be treated in the same way as in the natural world (Bryman, 2008; Creswell, 2008; Robson, 2011). Interpretivism which seeks the cultural and historical interpretations of real life (Crotty, 1998 cited in Gray, 2009) focused more on disability as a facet of human difference. Moreover, interpretivists believed that the researcher must understand the meanings that represent the particular social action through interpretation (Schwandt, 2003). For some time, the interpretive approach along with the adoption of qualitative research tended to dominate social science research on disability. This paradigm also espouses a participatory approach and interprets disability issues from the perspectives of those involved (Bury, 1996). In more recent years, more quantitative research has been undertaken but it can be argued that the approach has been shaped by earlier critiques within Disability Studies (Gordon *et al.*, 2000).

The challenges in the 1990s by disabled academics and activists were not simply reserved for positivism. All forms of research were beginning to be judged according to what their benefit was to disabled people. Drawing on the feminist and postmodern perspectives which emphasise the importance

of individual experience, disability researchers have called for more inclusive research with persons with disabilities at the heart of the process (Barnes, 1992; Morris, 1992; Oliver, 1992). Influenced by social model of disability (Walmsley, 2001) such researchers have argued that the only way to produce 'un-alienated' research is to fundamentally change the social relations of research production (Oliver, 1992).

Thus, many disability movements have urged that the emancipatory paradigm should be espoused in disability research (Danieli & Woodhams, 2005; French & Swain, 1997; Stone & Priestley, 1996) so as to eliminate the marginalisation of persons with disabilities and to have a significant effect on their empowerment and the practical policies which benefit their lives (Barnes, 2003). Emancipatory research also supports the slogan of disability movements "*Nothing about us without us*" (Walmsley, 2005:735) which seeks the participation of persons with disabilities in any disability research. While many have emphasised the importance of participation, others have emphasised that participation alone does not inevitably mean that research is conducted within an emancipatory paradigm.

Oliver (1992) has emphasised that the importance of disability research is not in the participation but the relevance of the research reflecting the real lives of persons with disabilities, which may have meaningful impact on the policy outcomes. He set the emancipatory research agenda by addressing six key standards of quality research enquiring into what are the research questions should be addressed, who decides what they are, what are the

theoretical underpinnings of the process and the questions to be researched, who controls and what difference you could make for disabled people.

Similarly, Goodley & Lawthom (2006) suggest that disability researchers should be mindful of eight key questions in terms of inclusion, accountability, praxis, dialectics, ontology, disablism or impairment, partisan and analytical levels of the research asking about the participation of disabled people, the possession of the research, the understanding of impairment and the impact of disability research. Discussing further on this, Goodley (2011) summarises the debates and emphasises three fundamental issues: the ownership, involvement and application of the research. This signifies the questions of who did the research (by whom), who was involved in the research (with whom) and what is the impact of the research (for whom).

In reviewing this argument, Goodley (2011) underline three positions of disability studies –non-participatory, participatory and emancipatory- by recapitulating the position of Barnes (1996), (Shakespeare & Watson (1997) and Oliver (1998). Barnes (1996) argued for a strong position on emancipatory approach whereby the researcher must work with organisations of people with disabilities to adopt social model research which aims to provide significant impact on the politics of disability. Shakespeare (1997) on the other hand is claimed to consider that research can be academic and non-participatory as long as the aim of disability studies of theorising and tackling disabling society is achieved. Furthermore, for him, the developed theories also could be applied further in emancipatory

research. Finally, Oliver (1998) supports participatory research which is positioned in between emancipatory and non-participatory research. He believes that in order to produce a meaningful research, disability studies researchers should strive to achieve the aims and targets of disabled people.

The debates on research within Disability Studies have been influential in relation to this thesis. This project is attempting to addressing questions related to issues which have repeatedly been identified as important by disabled people -how to have the right to a life in work and the workplace (Barnes *et al.*, 1999; Barnes, 2003; International Labour Office, 2008). As such, this research explores one of the most important aspects of the lives of persons with learning difficulties. It aims to find out about the experience of people with learning difficulties themselves and it also seeks to understand how others who are significantly-placed to assist or hinder them in this regard- government officials, NGOs coordinators and company managers – perceive the ability of this group to work and what they see as appropriate provision.

5.2.2 Mixed methods and exploratory case study research.

This research was set up to use mixed –qualitative and quantitative - methods of research with the belief it would offer more opportunities to explore the lived experiences of the people involved (Wehman *et al.*, 2005) thereby gaining a deeper understanding of the social phenomena concerned (Stake, 1995).

A qualitative methodology implies an emphasis on discovery and description, and aims to extract and interpret the meaning of experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Merriam, 1998). However, while qualitative interpretive research is acknowledged as offering contextual depth, it has often been criticised in terms of its lack of validity, reliability and capacity for generalisation (Kelliher, 2005). Such research is assumed by some to be biased and subjective (Gray, 2009), suffers from questionable “*consistency or stability of a measure*” (Kelliher, 2005: 123) and fails to use representative samples.

Therefore, in order to address these criticisms of qualitative research, data triangulation was seemed important to improve the construct validity (Remenyi *et al.*, 1998) and to have greater reliability. Hence, the qualitative and quantitative approaches were balanced to fit the purpose of the research. In this case, the quantitative aspect of the research -the survey- is found useful to provide the basic data on the population of employees with learning difficulties participating in this first employment initiative as well as on general insights on their experience in supported employment. Besides, the qualitative features -the interviews- are also important in offering explanation, rationalisation and rich descriptions of the phenomenon.

As a method of research, a case study approach was seemed suitable since it is able to provide a rich, detailed and concrete description (Patton, 2002) and has the capacity to reveal the concepts being implemented in the real

setting, through empirical success of evidence (Berg, 2004; Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994). As Merriam (1998) signifies:

“A case study design is employed to gain an in depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation. Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research” (Merriam, 1998:19)

Similar to this idea of qualitative case study as an ideal design for understanding and interpreting phenomenon, Yin (2003) defines the exploratory case study approach as

“...an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within the real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2003:13)

The present research meets well both Merriam’s and Yin’s criteria for a case study because it sought to better understand the development and implementation of supported employment among persons with learning difficulties in a major retailer group in Malaysia, the BZ Corporation (a pseudonym). Realising the importance of participation, this study explored the experience of those in supported employment from their own perspectives. It also sought to capture the views and experiences of other insiders and of outsiders (Robson, 1993): people with intellectual disabilities who had entered supported employment in BZ Corporation, managers, government officials and NGOs coordinators.

In addition, the case study was seen as a suitable approach to developing evidence with potentially generic significance, in spite of the fact that the situation concerned was unique since it has never previously arisen, at least

in Malaysia. Therefore, building a clear understanding of this case was potentially valuable (Punch, 2005) in order to provide those stakeholders with information about supported employment and the comparison with the implementation of integration in other countries as revealed by the research literature. As a consequence, it is hoped that employees with learning difficulties who are the service recipients will benefit from the appropriate implementation at the workplace.

The previous paragraphs have set out the theoretical paradigm adopted for the study which forms the research framework. The next section looks at the research design to get the information in order to achieve the aims of the study.

5.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

In achieving a comprehensive understanding of persons with learning difficulties and supported employment, the four main research questions were broken down into several sub-questions (as shown in Table 5.1) to gather the primary data needed. Guided by the conceptual framework adopted and the review of previous research findings, this fell into three categories of data;

- (a) Demographic information pertaining to participants, employees and officials
- (b) The business, social and local context of supported employment
- (c) Employees' perception of their abilities and other respondents' perception on the abilities of this group

Apart from the initial analysis of BZ's administrative data, this study then employed three different data collection methods according to the type of information required, as shown in Table 5.1: survey, group interview and individual interview which will be discussed in detail in the next section 5.4.

Table 5.1 Details of Information Needed

	Research Questions	Information needed [What the researcher need to know]	Methods
PERSONS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES AND CAPACITY TO WORK			
Research Question 1: To what extent persons with learning difficulties are capable to join supported employment?			
1a	How do persons with learning difficulties perceive their capacity in joining supported employment?	- perceptions of employees on their own capacity in joining supported employment	Survey Group Interview
1b	How do others perceive the capacity of persons with learning difficulties to join supported employment?	-perceptions of the officials, managers and NGOs on the capacity of persons with learning difficulties to join supported employment	Interview
SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT			
Research Question 2: What are the factors that influence the emergence of supported employment in Malaysia?			
Research Question 3: How has supported employment for persons with learning difficulties been implemented?			
2a	What influence the development of supported employment in Malaysia?	-factors which supports the development of supported employment in Malaysia	Interview
2b	What influence the development of supported employment in the company?	-motivations that influence the initiative of supported employment	Interview
3a.	What activities did the employer engage in to implement supported employment?	-strategies planned by the company in implementing supported employment	Survey Group Interview Interview
3b	How the government and NGOs encourage supported employment?	-support given by the government and NGOs in promoting supported employment	Interview
3c.	What are the challenges in implementing supported employment?	-challenges faced in implementing supported employment	Interview
3d.	What are the recommendations to enhance supported employment?	-suggestions proposed to improve or enhance the scheme	Interview
EVALUATION			
Research Question 4: How has supported employment affected the lives of persons with learning difficulties, socially and economically?			
4a	What are the experiences of persons with learning difficulties in supported employment?	-views shared by employees with learning difficulties on their experiences in joining supported employment	Survey Group interview Interview
4b	What are the impacts on the employees with learning difficulties?	-impacts on the employees' personal and social development	Survey Group interview Interview

4c	What are the impacts on the company?	-impacts on the company	Interview
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So as to discuss the research design, this section identifies the processes involved in designing the research in relation to reviewing the literature, getting access to conduct the empirical work, considering the ethical issues, selecting the research participants and deciding on having a research advisory group. Finally, the overview of the research design will be identified and presented to enlighten the systematic approach taken to the data collection methods.

5.3.1 Literature review

Selections of the research literature on theorising disability and on broad areas of employment support for persons with learning difficulties have already been reviewed prior to proceeding with the actual collection of data. Chapter 2 describes disability issues in the context of Malaysian policies and guidelines pertaining to the support provided for persons with disabilities. Chapter 3 then expands the discussion towards the theoretical issues concerning disability and models of disability. Finally, previous research on the labour market experience of persons with learning difficulties was examined in Chapter 4.

5.3.2 Access

A preliminary discussion with the human resource manager of BZ Corporation was held on 27th of October 2009. Several issues relating to the employment of persons with learning difficulties in the company were

discussed. Administrative data on employees with disabilities were also obtained for preliminary analysis.

Since the empirical work was planned to be performed in Malaysia, the researcher has to abide by the Regulations for Conduct of Research in Malaysia¹² which require any foreign researcher or Malaysian national domiciled overseas to attain prior permission from the government. Written permission from the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) of the Prime Minister's Department was obtained on 19th of March, 2010 (UPE: 0/200/19/2586). Following that, formal access to BZ Corporation was applied for to conduct the survey and interviews among their employees with learning difficulties as well as the managers who have direct contact with this group. In addition, the respondents from government departments, Japan International Cooperation Organisation (JICA) and NGOs were directly contacted to get their consent to be interviewed and schedule the suitable time for the interview session.

5.3.3 Ethical considerations

Particular attention was given in this study to the ethical issues relating to participants' protection (Berg, 2004; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Schram, 2003). Since the research was conducted in the home country of the researcher, she is familiar with the diverse ethnic, cultural and religious contexts. This research is an exploratory case study as it looks into persons

¹²General Circular No. 3, 1999

with learning difficulties and supported employment from the perspectives of the participants. Thus, this research does not deal with what is deemed culturally sensitive in the Malaysian context. Moreover, discussion with the research advisory group members identified no potential areas of sensitivity in relation to persons with learning difficulties other than those relating to them as, to a degree, vulnerable respondents.

Valuing the voluntary cooperation from the participants, cautionary measures were employed to ensure the protection and rights of participants in line with the research ethics of the university and the government of Malaysia.

Participants' names were changed to pseudonyms. Written consent from participants was obtained via the survey to approach individuals to participate in the interviews before conducting the interviews. Besides, permission were sought to digitally record the interviews. The purpose of the research and the procedures to be followed were also explained. They were informed about their rights to decline to answer any questions being asked or to withdraw from the study at any point without having to give any reason. They were guaranteed that access to the research related records and data were restricted to only the researcher, her supervisors and the examiners.

5.3.4 Research Participants

This study was conducted in Malaysia, a developing country which is still struggling to create equal opportunities for disabled people. The setting of the study was selected to be in BZ Corporation as one of the largest retail companies in Malaysia. This is due to the fact that currently retail business

has been developed to be the largest potential job market for persons with learning difficulties (P. Jones & Schmidt, 2004) as a result of accessibility and/or mobility (Yeo, 2007). Most hypermarkets and superstores are located in the town or major cities where the mode of transport is better compared to factories or manufacturing which usually locate in less accessible areas.

In terms of job characteristics, most jobs which are available in the retail sector such as arranging goods on shelves, folding clothes and wrapping goods are quite repetitive in nature and need fewer communicative skills. These job characteristics are seen as being suitable for most persons with learning difficulties (Brown *et al.*, 2006) and in-site training for them has been developed to suit their abilities (Ogawa, 2002; Yeo, 2007).

BZ Corporation has more than 500 stores, supermarkets and hypermarkets nationwide and is the first leading Malaysian retailer to introduce a supported employment scheme for persons with disabilities. The company takes pride in its role as an equal opportunity employer and has initiated this employment scheme to enable disabled people to be gainfully employed by it.

The BZ Corporation supported employment scheme is implemented by a dedicated team of 15 trainers who work with NGOs and parents, so that they fully understand the needs of persons with disabilities. Since the launch of the scheme, today BZ Corporation has trained hundreds of persons with disabilities and 108 are now full-time employees. More importantly, having started to offer job opportunities to 13 employees with *learning difficulties* in

2008, they have currently multiplied the number up to 82 employees. Being the only company which provides opportunities for a large group of persons with learning difficulties, BZ Corporation therefore provides useful scope for this investigation. Therefore, there was no doubt this selection is being made in order to explore the experiences of the employer dealing with employees with learning difficulties in the supported employment.

For the survey and group interview participants' selection, purposive sampling was applied to correspond to the research questions (Bryman, 2008), and to allow a clear and comprehensive investigation of the phenomena (Patton, 2002). In addition, the survey aimed to gain a wider picture of the population of the employment scheme and recognise employees' experience in supported employment. These findings simultaneously acted as a basis for selecting employees to be interviewed in the group interviews. Thus, 82 employees with learning difficulties who were employed by BZ Corporation were targeted to participate in the study.

The respondents for the group interviews were ideally planned to be selected from the survey based on the consent given and diversity of the characteristics. However, since the survey data was not fully gathered after being distributed for four weeks and due to the reluctance of the company to give access to all outlets, the recruitment process was changed to purposive sampling. Hence, the interview participants were suggested by the company to be chosen from the central zone outlets. Having an interest in the large number of employees with learning difficulties in an outlet in the south zone

as detailed in the administrative data provided by the company, the researcher tried her best to request an opportunity to have at least one group interview from the south zone. This situation seemed interesting to be explored to see any differences in their experiences compared to other outlets which only have one or two employees with learning difficulties.

In addition, although the company has been very restricted in selecting the group interview participants, in order to sustain the representativeness of the sample, a negotiation with the Human Resource Manager to select the participants with range of gender, race and education histories was successfully achieved. Therefore, broad inclusion criteria were established which required participants to have learning difficulties and be able to contribute to a discussion regarding their experience on their current employment. Finally, 23 employees with learning difficulties, of whom 18 were male and 5 female, were involved in these group interviews.

In order to seek understandings from different point of view, three different categories of organisational respondents were selected to be involved in the study: government, NGOs and employer. Purposive sampling was also utilised to select the person to interview with the intention to gather specific information from the most knowledgeable source related to the research area (Merriam, 1998). The criteria were based on their direct knowledge and experience with persons with learning difficulties and of providing employment support for the group.

Six respondents representing government perspectives were selected from the related departments which have responsibilities in relation to persons with disabilities. Three departments; Development for Persons with Disabilities Department (DPwDD), Special Education Division (SED) and Labour Department (LD) were contacted to provide at least two representatives to be interviewed, and full support was given by each agency. Since JICA is collaborating with SWD in supporting employment for persons with learning difficulties, they were also selected to be part of this governmental group.

While in terms of NGOs, there are actually several NGOs in Malaysia which support the development and rights of persons with disabilities. However, few concentrate mainly on persons with learning difficulties. Three NGOs, Malaysian CARE, PERKOBP and United Voice, were selected as being the top three organisations that actively represent the rights of this group and have contributed significantly to improving their situations. Therefore, coordinators of these three were interviewed to widen coverage of the perspectives of parents and carers as well as persons with learning difficulties themselves. Finally, seven managers from BZ Corporation who manage the outlets which had employees with learning difficulties were also interviewed to deepen understanding of the employer's views on supported employment.

5.3.5 Research Advisory Group

Given that persons with learning difficulties were seen as being excluded from mainstream research on disability and building on the notion of *"nothing about us without us"* (Walmsley, 2005:735), a research advisory group (RAG) involving persons with learning difficulties was established to advise and support the research. Five members were selected with the assistance of an NGO to be on advisory panels to share their ideas and assessments of the design and findings of the research. Most of them have primary and secondary educational background and were only diagnosed as having learning difficulties when they were in secondary school. All of them have experiences of working in supported employment. Sharing with them the research aims and objectives, they expressed their thankfulness for having someone who would like to share their experiences and care about persons with learning difficulties. They were really grateful for being given the opportunity to contribute to the research.

Three discussions were arranged with the first discussion held prior to the field work. The languages to be adopted were discussed and it was proposed to use both Malay and English since some Chinese respondents do not understand Malay since they usually converse in either Chinese or English. Their views on the level of language used in the questionnaire were also checked. In addition, when consulted about the group interview, they affirmed that this would be a suitable approach to employees with learning

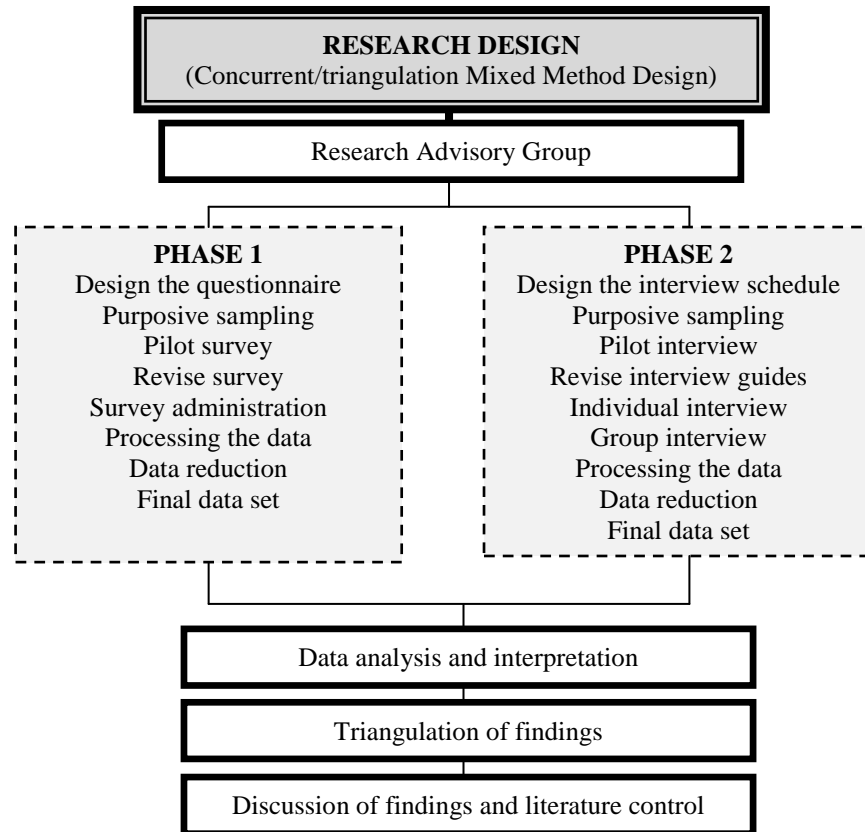
difficulties to create a comfortable atmosphere for them to disclose their feelings and share their experiences.

The second discussion was conducted in the midst of the field work to discuss the selection of group interviews participants. The advice given was that participant selection should be determined by reference to gender, race, education and employment history, and place of work. Finally, the preliminary findings were shared in the third discussion and their opinions and responses were also gathered to ensure that the analysis and outcomes of the study are relevant to and cover the full range of challenges faced by the group.

5.3.6 Overview of Research Design

Overall, the research process was divided into two phases (see Figure 5.1). The first phase concerned the analysis of the BZ administrative data on its employees and the design and administration of the survey based upon it to generate the data on socio-demographic descriptions of employees with learning difficulties and their general perceptions of supported employment. The second phase of the research sought a deeper understanding of their experiences as well as the views of the other actors involved with the scheme.

Figure 5.1 Research Process



5.4 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

This section discusses three methods engaged in collecting the research data- survey, group interviews and individual interviews- with regard to the instruments development, the pilot study and the final empirical work. A questionnaire was developed for the survey and semi structured interview schedules were adopted for both group and individual interviews to provide some degree of standardization yet allow for flexibility (Hutchison & Wilson, 1992). In addition, each method was piloted in order to improve the quality

and efficiency (Yates, 2004) of the subsequent empirical research. Besides, the pilot studies also indicated the relevance and importance of particular issues and strengthened the choice of instruments for the main study (Stake, 1995).

5.4.1 Survey

As the focused respondents were geographically dispersed, a survey method was chosen to be able to get a large number of responses quickly from the population (Muijs, 2004). Survey administration was beneficial as all of the targeted employees with learning difficulties could answer the questions at their own convenience expressing their feelings on experiences. The survey was conducted in April 2010 on the purposive sample of employees with learning difficulties drawn from the BZ Corporation (N=82) enquiring into their personal background; education, training, working history and experience of supported employment. The company administrative data of employees with learning difficulties was used as a basis from which to select respondents. In addition, the survey was intended as a guide to select the potential employees to be interviewed in the group interviews afterwards and to obtain their prior consent to be approached for this. Thus it was hoped to recruit a representative sample of participants in terms of their characteristics and circumstances.

The instrument

A set of questionnaire based on previous questionnaires relating to disability, job opportunities, job integration and job satisfaction was created (see

Appendix 5.1). Questions relating to a similar topic or idea were grouped together (Dillman, 2009) so as “to lower the cognitive load on respondents and allows them to think more deeply about the topic, rather than ‘switching gear’ after every question” (Lazar *et al.*, 2010:114). Therefore, questions have been divided into three main parts, namely personal background information, employment with BZ Corporation and views on employment.

Part A is concerned with the respondents’ background socio-demographic information- gender, ethnic group, types of disability, education and training and previous jobs experience. Respondents were also asked about their family background in this section.

Part B of the questionnaire focuses on the basic employment information of the employees with learning difficulties with BZ Corporation. Respondents were also asked about their perception on their types of jobs and what they understand about their responsibilities.

Part C seeks to explore the respondents’ perceptions and feelings about their employment. It aims to discover whether the employees with learning difficulties feel that their experience in supported employment has enhanced their job satisfaction. In developing these items, several job satisfaction surveys used by companies and in disability-employment related studies were referred to as guides in setting up the questionnaire. The questionnaire in this section mainly adopts a 5-point *Likert* scale with answers ranging from very happy (1) to very unhappy (5).

In order to compare their perception of their job satisfaction in previous and current employment, two identical groups of sub items were used. Sixteen (16) sub-items enquiring about the respondents' levels of satisfaction in different areas were introduced. Three sub-items related to their satisfaction with the workplace (C1-1, C1-2, C1-3 and C2-1, C2-2, C2-3), one sub-item captured satisfaction with financial rewards (C1-4 and C2-4), three sub-items were about the work itself (C1-5, C1-6, C1-7 and C2-5, C2-6, C2-7), five sub-items covered social relationship (C1-8, C1-9, C1-10, C1-11, C1-12 and C2-8, C2-9, C2-10, C2-11, C2-12) and four sub-items concerned motivation (C1-13, C1-14, C1-15, C1-16 and C2-13, C2-14, C2-15, C2-16).

Referring to the suggestion made by the RAG, the questionnaire was prepared in two versions: Malay and English. The level of language used in the questionnaire was taken into consideration by using simple and straightforward language corresponding with the level of understanding anticipated for persons with learning difficulties. It was apparent that most other questionnaires used with this group had employed visual-aids.

However, the respondents were mostly literate according to the assessments made by the Human Resource Manager of BZ Corporation; experience with the pilot and survey itself confirmed that there was, indeed, no need for such aids.

Pilot survey

The pilot survey aimed at testing the initial assumptions about the perceptions of the respondents on their employment experience of supported

employment. In addition it was planned to examine the level of understanding among persons with learning difficulties to read, understand and answer the questions in order to see if any amendment should be made to the survey questionnaire.

In view of the fact that supported employment is a new approach opened for persons with learning difficulties, there are only a few companies which accommodate this group. So as to find other employees with learning difficulties who were working in similar environment to BZ Corporation, the pilot study was intended to be conducted in another retail sector. Thus, two other retail companies which were hiring employees with learning difficulties were contacted. Unfortunately, they refused to participate in the research.

Instead, the pilot survey was arranged among United Voice members, one of the leading Self Advocacy groups for persons with learning difficulties in Malaysia. Having the opportunity to attend and join their social monthly meeting in April 2010, the pilot study was conducted with five members who are working in supported employment during the event. Based on the pilot responses, some words and tenses were changed to make the text clearer and easier to be understood. In addition, the amount of time required to answer the survey was also tested and found to be 15 to 20 minutes depending on their speed of reading and level of understanding. This was deemed to be acceptable.

Survey administration

In the first discussion with the company, permission was given for the researcher to run the survey herself at every outlet which had employees with learning difficulties. This kind of approach would enable explanations to be offered should there be a need for any clarification. Considering the enormous time to be spent to visit outlets all over the country, the Human Resource Manager suggested arranging the survey in three zones: central, north and south. Seeing that the central zone which includes Kuala Lumpur, Selangor and Negeri Sembilan has the most employees with learning difficulties, the survey was to be started with the central zone and conducted at the headquarters training centre. Following the central zone, the north zone inclusive of Perak and Penang, and the south zone for Malacca and Johor would then be completed.

However, after amending the survey questions, and handing over the survey to the company, the manager announced the company's decision to distribute the surveys to every outlet having employees with learning difficulties through email due to the time constraint to gather the employees in a training centre in each zone. The researcher had to agree with this decision though she was concerned not to have the opportunity to run the survey in person and was worried about the potential delay in collecting the answered questionnaires. Thus, the survey was emailed to the manager at the headquarters to be distributed via email to each Human Resource outlet manager. They then printed the questionnaire and distributed it to the

identified employees. After that, the employees were asked to answer the questionnaire individually and return it to company headquarters in a sealed envelope to maintain confidentiality.

The researcher knew that giving responsibilities to others would drag out the period of collecting the questionnaires, her fears being confirmed by only receiving 40 questionnaires after three weeks. After about six weeks, 64 questionnaires had been received but only 57 of them were valid. The other seven were rejected because the respondents had only hearing not learning disabilities. The researcher tried her best through frequently contacting BZ Corporation management to get the balance of the surveys but it became apparent that just 57 completed questionnaires would be available for analysis.

5.4.2 Group Interviews with Employees

The group interviews were part of the triangulation strategy adopted and supplement the survey by offering more chances of clarification and explanation. They also facilitate working within the participatory tradition. In group interviews, data are formed and developed through group interaction. In addition to being encouraged to reflect on their own views and experiences the group process creates more insightful expression and discussion as a result of listening to others and thinking further (Puchta & Porter, 2004). Knowing each other well, as in this case, there was also a sense of spontaneity and naturalness in their interaction as if talking among friends as they work together in a natural social context (Krueger & Casey,

2000) rather than being in one-to-one interviews, especially when it comes to the first time experience of sharing with 'strangers'.

The interview schedule

The four research questions were used as the framework within which to develop the semi-structured interview schedule. Two major areas of investigation were determined: respondents' perceptions of their capabilities and their experiences in participating in supported employment. The schedule was then discussed with the RAG to get ideas and feedback. The comments were incorporated and the edited schedule (see Appendix 5.2) was referred for final comment from the RAG.

The pilot interview

Pilot group interviews were conducted also with four United Voice members on the same occasion as doing the piloting of the survey as discussed in section 5.5.1. General themes emerged from the interviews and from these was developed a series of open-ended questions to allow for more varied responses during the interviews. The researcher learnt from these pilot interviews that the prompts or questions asked need not follow the sequence of the interview schedule but rather to respond to the conversation under way. However, the interview schedule was essential to making sure she got the information needed.

The interviews

The interviews were conducted in June 2010. Before interviews were commenced, the interviewees were asked to review and sign a research consent form required for participation in the study (see Appendix 5.3). Participants were informed about the aim of the group interview which was to tap into their views as 'experts' on their own experience. They expressed their excitement to be involved in the research. The group interviews were conducted in the headquarters office training room and were digitally recorded with the permission of all participants to reduce the level of anxiety.

Participants were grouped according to their workplace to ease the process of interviews. As suggested by Krueger and Casey (2000), the group interview consisted of three to five people to create a better group interaction. Besides, the researcher acted as a moderator and an assistant from the Labour Department supported the researcher in note-taking. Simple Malay or English language was used, paying attention to Flynn's (1986) reminder to make the type of questioning suit the ability of persons with learning difficulties participating in the research. In addition, open-ended questions which were simply phrased were used. The researcher sometimes reworded or rephrased questions to achieve their understanding.

However, the original intention to use the focus group method in which the researcher only acts as a facilitator could not be sustained due to the reaction from respondents. They seemed to find it difficult to express their views and the questions needed to be made more explicit in order to get their

explanation. However, the researcher followed the principle of (Deitch *et al.*, 2003) asking non-directive questions and seeking to share more their everyday experience. The interviews lasted between 60 to 90 minutes and were digitally recorded subject to permission and the researcher continually checked for the accuracy of respondents' meanings, engaged them in active feedback, and confirmed any interpretations of the data throughout the interview.

5.4.3 Individual Interviews with Officials, Managers and NGO Staffs

Individual interviews were also conducted to obtain clear understandings of other actors' perspectives (Creswell, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Respondents were selected to be among policymakers, senior executives in BZ Corporation and representatives of relevant NGOs.

The interview schedule

The questions asked were adapted to suit the different categories of respondents (see Appendix 5.4). The interviewing process was divided into two main areas: first, questions about the interviewee which are important to help in getting to know the respondent more closely and for analytical purposes; and topics relating to the study itself. However respondents were given full rights to share their knowledge and express their open responses and insights about the subject matter.

The pilot interviews

Pilot interviews were conducted with two Labour Officers in April 2010 to refine both procedures and help in developing relevant lines of questions and conceptual clarity. The pilot report provided a basis for considering both research design and fieldwork procedures. Since the respondents were dragging in certain issues relating to their scope of work, it was noticed that the interviews should follow their ideas of answer during the conversation instead of following the list of questions to help smooth the interview process.

The interviews

The individual interviews were conducted during April to June 2010. Before commencing the interview, as mentioned in section 5.3.2; research consent for participating in the research was obtained. Participants were informed about the aims of the interviews and their rights pertaining to the interviews were described. Respondents were assured of their privacy and confidentiality when participating in the study, in accordance with the ethics procedures. They were told that they had the option not to answer any questions that they chose not to. The interviews were conducted in the participants' offices to create a comfortable environment to share their ideas. The medium of Malay or English whichever was preferred by the respondents was used. The interviews lasted between 50 and 120 minutes and were digitally recorded.

The researcher started by interviewing two government officials from SED and another two from LD. Based on these interviews and suggestions made

by the participants, the researcher decided to add the respondent from the Minister of Higher Education (MoHE) to get the view of the Ministry which monitors the training scheme for school leavers (young persons above 17 years old). Several ways of applying for access to conduct an interview with relevant officer of the Ministry were tried but this was refused on the grounds that they had no specific unit catering for persons with disabilities.

Regardless of this rejection, the researcher sought through email to get some questions answered but after a year, no response was received from them though they had been followed up, which means no additional information could be obtained. The interviews were continued with other respondents from DPwDD, JICA and NGOs.

For the managers from BZ Corporation, interviews were restricted to managers from the central zone. Adapting to these restrictions, the researcher used criterion sampling to select suitable participants. Since the researcher targeted the experiential experts on the phenomenon studied, the managers were selected based on a broad criterion of having direct contact with employees with learning difficulties. Moreover, the researcher also requested to interview managers from the south zone for the same reason mentioned in section 5.4.3 which is to share the experience of having a large number of employees with learning difficulties in their outlet. Finally, seven managers- four male and three female- were interviewed. Their working experience varied from two to fifteen years: two were from the training unit and five were selected from different outlets. The interviews were transcribed in the language spoken but the coding process was completed in English.

5.5 DATA ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS PROCESS

As a mixed method study, two types of analysis were employed in this research: statistical and interpretive (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Thomas, 2003). The former was carried out using Statistical Package for Social Sciences Version 17 (SPSS 17) to analyse the data obtained from the survey. The latter involved analysing the interviews both manually and using NVivo9¹³ through thematic analysis (Patton, 2002). For the qualitative aspects of the research, participants were divided into four groups: employees with learning difficulties, governmental officials, managers and NGO coordinators. These four groups were analysed independently following the four steps of analysis suggested by Creswell (2007): transcribing, coding, developing themes and writing the narrative.

The first step involved recording the interviews and then transcribing them verbatim using the language used during the interview. The notes taken during the interview were checked against the transcriptions and verified to ensure the accuracy of the information. The transcriptions were then explored to get a preliminary exploratory analysis in a process to understand and describe the phenomenon of interest. In the process of getting a preliminary exploratory analysis, two different interpretations due to different languages and cultural understandings of supervisors and the researcher were involved. Perspectives from those who share similar language and

¹³the software developed by QSR International

culture were deemed essential to enhance the accuracy and diversity of the analysis. Therefore, a cross cultural discussion was suggested to be performed with the aim to have an ample view about the data. This discussion was successfully conducted in December 2010 with the participation of four Malaysian PhD students as members of discussion along with the researcher and supervisors. Preliminary findings were revealed and better understanding was grasped on issues concerning the different perspectives of disability research. The understanding of diverse interpretations due to language and cultural differences could be exchanged and rationalised which finally helped in heightening the level of analysis extensively.

The common process of data analysis began by the exploration and reduction of data which includes step by step analysis to uncover major issues, concepts, categories and their relationship. This coding process of segmenting and labelling texts was the second step of analysis to make sense of a large amount of data by forming categories and broad themes in the data (Creswell, 2005). The first phase of identifying the nodes or themes from the interviews was done with NVivo9 (Bryman, 2008). Some preliminary ideas regarding the categories and themes became apparent. However, since coding process involves changes, analysing the data manually was found easier compared to using the Nvivo9. Furthermore, themes from the small number of interviews could be clearly seen using colour coding on a large chart sheet.

The third step involved describing and developing themes from the data on the basis to answer the research questions and shape a broad understanding of the phenomenon. Finally, the written narratives were prepared to complete the data analysis. However this was not always the final steps as the researcher sometimes needed to move back to reduction and analysing of data.

In contrast to the coding process which fragments the interview into separate categories to look at each detail, *synthesis* involves merging these segments together to create a general and integrated explanation. During the process, the seven-stages of conceptualisation of the mixed-method data analysis process suggested by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) were followed (see Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2 Seven-stage conceptualization of mixed-method data analysis process



(Adapted from Johnson & Onwuegbuzie (2004:10))

5.6 ISSUES OF TRUSTWORTHINESS

The 'trustworthiness' of quantitative data refers to their validity and reliability. Validity addresses the degree to which something measures what it purports to measure, while reliability concerns the consistency with which measurement is taken over time, space or any other dimension (Joppe, 2000 in Golafshani, 2003). The trustworthiness of qualitative data may be seen in terms of its *credibility*, *dependability*, *confirmability*, and *transferability* (Guba & Lincoln, 1998).

5.6.1 Credibility

The principle of credibility which concerns the accuracy and correctness of the data findings from the perspectives of the researcher, the participants and the reader becomes a key component of research design (Creswell, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1994). In response to this principle, testing the credibility of the conclusion made from the findings requires both methodological and interpretive validity (Mason, 1996).

Methodological validity considers proving the validation of the connection between research design components- the study's purpose, conceptual framework, research questions, and methods- in getting the explanation for the research findings. Towards this end, the data sources were triangulated by gathering data from both the recipients and the management responsible for supported employment. In addition, the researcher conducted multiple data collection methods; survey, group interview and individual interviews which generate a rich illustration of the reviewed scheme.

Interpretive validity concerns the credibility of the data analysed and interpreted. In this study, various strategies were employed to enhance the interpretive validity of the study. First, she explained her effort to continually check the participants' meaning for any distortions throughout the interview process and compare the recorded data and the digitally recorded interviews for accuracy. Second, the researcher's analysis also was checked by participants as suggested by (Gall *et al.*, 2003) to confirm the interpretation. These strategies involved diverse understanding of the phenomenon and

enabled the researcher to review and revise her interpretations and analysis. In addition, the researcher also assessed and discussed findings with professional colleagues in an effort to ensure the accuracy of the findings.

5.6.2 Dependability

While reliability refers to the extent to which the study could be replicated in similar settings, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that qualitative research is concerned more with the consistency and dependability of the data collected. In other words, the goal in qualitative study is to verify that the researcher have the quality data as described earlier.

To achieve this end, member checking (Gall *et al.*, 2003) was conducted by having participant's review statements made in the researcher's analysis for accuracy. Although the analysis was generally found to be accurate, there were certain instances where the participants viewed the data from different perspectives. In these cases, the data were reviewed and revised to join the variant interpretations. Besides, an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was maintained recording the development of coding and analysis during the research process.

5.6.3 Transferability

In a qualitative study, the intention is not to achieve generalisability but rather a "thick description" (Denzin, 2001:114) of the phenomenon to allow for potential transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to other contexts. To adopt the issue of transferability, the researcher tried to share holistic and realistic

descriptions of the participants and the context. With the depth, richness, and detailed description provided, the study could potentially yield insights relevant to other broader contexts (Schram, 2003).

5.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter has described in detail the research methodology adopted for the study of the phenomenon of supported employment among persons with learning difficulties. A scrutiny of the research questions set out in earlier chapters and the scientific evidence already available has led to the choice of a mixed methods approach implemented within an interpretive research paradigm.

The participants in the research numbered, in all, approximately 100 people who were variously involved in a survey, group and individual interviews and/or as members of the Research Advisory Group. The research participants were drawn from the 82 employees with learning difficulties engaged in BZ Corporation's supported employment scheme, together with seven managers involved with the scheme, eight government officials and three NGO coordinators.

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS: SURVEY

6.1 INTRODUCTION

As a background to the study, it is important to have a distinctive understanding of supported employment situation from knowledge about employees engaged in this scheme. Therefore, administering a survey has been decided to be, firstly, conducted to get a clear conception about employees with learning difficulties in the company. In addition, the survey aims to gain an overall picture of employees' experience of supported employment.

For the study, this survey adopted a purposive sample of all 82 employees with learning difficulties drawn from the chosen company. The company's administrative data on employees with learning difficulties were used as a basis for a survey. This consisted of three main parts in which questions concerning to related topics or ideas are grouped together; these dealing with background socio-demographic information, employment with the company, and respondents' views on their experiences of employment.

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences Version 17 (SPSS 17) was used to analyse the data, adopting where appropriate, mainly nonparametric technique since the sample size is small, and most of the variables were measured using nominal (categorical) and ordinal (ranked) scales. In addition, textual responses to open-ended questions were also analysed.

This chapter is divided into two main sections: 6.2 Description of respondents and 6.3 Views on employment. It begins by briefly describing the characteristics of the employees with learning difficulties who participated in the current study. This is significant because it is likely that grasping a broad perception on the employees will help to understand the further profound discussion. The chapter will then move on to the second section to look in greater detail at their views on employment.

6.2 DESCRIPTIONS OF RESPONDENTS

This section comprehensively depicts the demographic of the respondents and their experience of education, training and employment, as well as their family support and socio-economic backgrounds.

6.2.1 Basic Characteristics

Based on the company's administrative data on 82 employees with learning difficulties at 26 different outlets throughout the three zones of Malaysia in October 2009, half of the populations are in the Central zone; 41 per cent are in the South and only 7 per cent in the North. Three-quarters are male and nearly 80 per cent are aged between 21 to 25 years old. In terms of ethnicity, 66 per cent are Malays, and quarters are Chinese while only 6 per cent are Indians and one employee is from other ethnics. Nearly all of them are sales assistants (Table 6.1).

Compared to the population, 60 per cent of the 57 study samples are from the Central zone, 30 per cent are from the South, and 10 per cent are from

the North. Similar to the administrative data, three-quarters of the respondents are male and more than half are aged between 21 to 25 years old. While in terms of ethnicity, Malays are slightly more than half of the respondents while 32 per cent are Chinese, 12 per cent are Indians, and 4 per cent are from other ethnics. Referring to their occupations, though five different positions were listed, the majority of 48 employees were sales assistants in 18 different units, four were customer service assistants, and only one was a receptionist. The remaining four had other roles, including security and information technology assistant (Table 6.1).

This comparison provides a useful illustration of the sample's representativeness of the whole population of employees with learning difficulties in the company. However, it should be noted that some sample items are higher than the corresponding population data. This is possible because the latter were recorded in October 2009 while the sample data were collected in June 2010. The composition of employees will have changed owing to turnover and new recruitment. However, a comparison of the sample and population figures indicates that the respondents represent quite well the whole population of employees with learning difficulties in the company (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1 Employment of persons with learning difficulties in BZ Corporation

ITEMS	Sub-items	Sample (n=57) As at June 2010		Population (n=82) As at Oct 2009	
		No	%	No	%
Zone	Central	34	60	42	51
	South	17	30	34	41
	North	6	10	6	7
Gender	Male	44	77	62	76
	Female	13	23	20	24
Age (years)	16-20	4	7	2	2
	21-25	33	58	64	78
	26-30	9	16	8	10
	31-35	7	12	6	7
	36-40	4	7	2	2
Ethnicity	Malay	30	52	54	66
	Chinese	18	32	22	26
	Indian	7	12	5	6
	Others	2	4	1	1
Position	Sales Assistant	48	84	79	96
	Receptionist	1	2	2	2
	Customer Service	4	7	1	1
	Others	4	7	0	0

6.2.2 Types of difficulties experienced in daily routine

When asked to identify their difficulties in doing regular routine tasks, a third of respondents mentioned problems in communicating and interacting with people and thirty per cent stated having mixed difficulties. Only 5 per cent mentioned limitations relating to memory or ability to concentrate, learn or understand (Table 6.2).

Table 6.2 Descriptions of Difficulties among Respondents

DESCRIPTION OF DIFFICULTIES	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
Mobility or moving around	4	7
Ability to lift, carry or moves object	5	9
Manual dexterity (using your hands to carry out everyday tasks)	3	5
Communication (speech, hearing or eyesight) and interaction with	19	33
Memory or ability to concentrate, learn or understand	3	5
Physical co-ordination	6	10
Mixed disabilities (of the above)	17	30
TOTAL	57	100

As regards perceptions of the impact of their difficulties on their performance at work, 54 per cent of respondents thought there was no such an effect and 46 per cent thought there was. In relation to literacy competencies, nearly all state their ability to read (95 per cent) and write (86 per cent) in Malay and approximately half claim their ability to read and to write in English. Even almost half can read and write in both Malay and English but for Chinese and Indian’s respondents; quite a few can read and write in their mother tongue (Table 6.3).

Table 6.3 Literacy competencies (n=57)

Language	Read	%	Write	%
Malay	54	95	49	86
Chinese	10	18	8	14
Indian	1	2	2	4
English	28	49	26	46

6.2.3 Education, training and previous employment

Generally, almost all the respondents have had a basic education except for two who never went to school. From those have school education, 51 per cent went to higher secondary school, 25 per cent attended up to mid-secondary school, 8 per cent stopped at primary school and 13 per cent had other types of education (Table 6.4). It should be noted, however, that there are four missing values. Thus, the total of respondents for this area under discussion is only 53 employees.

Table 6.4 Profiles of Basic Education (School)

School		No.	%
No		2	4
Yes	Primary School	4	8
	Mid Secondary School	13	25
	Higher Secondary School	27	51
	Others	7	13
Total	TOTAL	53	100
Missing		4	
	TOTAL	57	

As regards skills training, 63 per cent had attended a training institution, and 30 per cent had had no training (Table 6.5). In order to compare the experiences of respondents in attending training institutions, descriptions provided relating to the training institutions have been grouped into three categories: Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs), public training centres and private training centres. It appeared that looking through these descriptions; SMKV Indahpura was listed as one of the training centres, although it is considered as a school-based education. The curriculum provided by this vocational school encompasses and focuses on vocational

training to the students may be led to this confusion. Hence, for this study, SMKV Indahpura is regarded as one of the public training centres along with Bengkel Semangat Maju, PLPP Bangi, Politeknik Pasir Gudang, Pusat GIATMARA and Sijil Kemahiran Malaysia.

For the NGOs training centre attended, respondents named four -Kiwanis training centre, Malaysian Care, St. Paul's church training centre and Persatuan Kanak-kanak Istimewa Kajang. Just two recorded taking (bakery) classes at a private training centre. Thus, more than half of the respondents went to a public training centre compared to 22 per cent attending a NGOs centre.

Table 6.5 Profiles of Training and Details

TRAINING		No.	%
No		17	30
Yes	No detail given	2	4
	NGO Training Centre	12	22
	Kiwanis Training Centre	3	
	Malaysian Care	7	
	St Paul's Church Training Centre	1	
	Persatuan Kanak-kanak Istimewa Kajang	1	
	Public Training Centre	22	40
	Bengkel Semangat Maju	5	
	PLPP Bangi	2	
	Politeknik Pasir Gudang	1	
	Pusat GIATMARA	1	
	Sijil Kemahiran Malaysia	1	
	SMKV Indahpura	12	
	Private Training Centre	2	4
	Bakery Class	2	
	Total	55	
	Missing	2	
	TOTAL	57	

Comparing the experience of attending training institutions across ethnic groups, all the Malays, who attended a training institution, went to public training while half of the Chinese were trained by NGOs before joining the company (Table 6.6).

Table 6.6 Training Details between Ethnicity

		TRAINING			No Training	No Training Details	TOTAL
		NGO Training Centre	Public Training Centre	Private Training Centre			
Ethnic	Malay	0	18	0	11	0	30
	Chinese	9	2	1	3	2	18
	Indian	2	1	1	3	0	7
	Others	1	1	0	0	0	2
		12	22	2	17	2	55
MISSING							2
TOTAL							57

Overall, 45 per cent of respondents who attended training institution had no working experience before joining the company (Table 6.7). Taken together with the fact that 65 per cent of the employees with learning difficulties are

between 16 to 25 years old (Table 6.1); roughly half will have joined supported employment directly after completing their higher secondary school or vocational training.

Table 6.7 Respondents' Training and Working Experience

JOB EXPERIENCE	TRAINING		TOTAL
	YES	NO	
No, I never had a job	16 (45%)	5 (33%)	21 (37%)
Yes, I had a job in the past, but was mainly unemployed	8 (22%)	2 (13%)	10 (18%)
Yes, I had a job but want to try a new job in this organisation	11 (31%)	9 (60%)	20 (35%)
Missing			6 (11%)
TOTAL	35 (100%)	15 (100%)	57 (100%)

Overall, 37 per cent of respondents had no job experience when joining the company, 18 per cent had previously been working but were mainly unemployed and 35 per cent had had another job before taking the current job (Table 6.7).

In addition, it is apparent from the textual responses describing their previous jobs that three-quarters revealed having worked with their relatives or in sheltered workshops. Others declared working in mainstream employment such as an office assistant, a restaurant assistant or a pump attendant.

Moreover, the survey responses also show that, in getting a previous job, acquiring help from family and friends (37 per cent) and NGOs (26 per cent) was deemed essential. While for current employment, contact with NGOs has been more instrumental (35 per cent) compared to other sources of

employment services such as from LD (12 per cent), DPwDD (17 per cent) or private employment agencies. While 19 per cent describe seeking assistance from their school teachers as other sources (Table 6.8).

The scenario of seeking assistance from NGOs is seen to be most evident especially among the Chinese compared to the two other ethnic groups in both their previous (70 per cent) and current job (50 per cent). In contrast, Malays could be seen to seek assistance particularly from family and friends in getting their previous job. However, they tend to change the channel for entering the current job placement by getting support from teachers at school (32 per cent) and NGO coordinators (29 per cent).

Table 6.8 Ways to get a job by ethnicity

	Previous Jobs					Current Jobs				
	M	C	I	Others	TOTAL	M	C	I	Others	TOTAL
through Labour Department	4	0	0	0	4	3	2	1	0	6 (12%)
through Social Welfare Department	3	1	1	0	5	4	3	1	1	9 (17%)
through private employment agencies	2	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	1
through NGOs	3	7	0	0	10 (26%)	8	8	2	0	18 (35%)
following up job adverts in newspapers	2	0	1	0	3	0	1	0	0	1
through contact with family or friends	9	2	2	1	14 (37%)	3	2	2	0	7 (13%)
other sources (teachers at school)	0	0	0	0	0	9	0	1	0	10 (19%)
Total	23	10	4	1	38	28	16	7	1	52
Missing						2	2	0	1	5
TOTAL	23	10	4	1	38	30	18	7	2	57

*M=Malay C=Chinese I=Indian

6.2.4 Current employment in the company

Regarding current employment, all the respondents had full-time employment contracts. Being full-time, they were assigned regular working hours; these depended on the location of the outlets but were -either from 8am to 5pm or 9am to 6pm or, for almost half of the employees, involved shift work from 2pm to 11pm or 3pm to 12pm.

Since the majority of them had the same position as sales assistant, the job descriptions portrayed that they shared the similar roles and functions. Stacking goods, checking prices, labelling price tags and checking expiry dates were the most common routines they had to do every day. Other descriptions were guided by their specific functions depends on the department they were belonged to such as folding and hanging clothes, wrapping fruit, lifting goods, baking breads or weighing goods. While for customer service assistants, their roles could be regarded as more demanding as they had to have direct interaction with customers in assisting with their complaints, giving away free gifts and preparing stock refund (Table 6.9).

Table 6.9 Respondents Job Descriptions

POSITION	JOB DESCRIPTIONS
Sales assistant	Stack goods, check price, label price tag, check expiry date, clean shelves(wrap fruits, fold clothes, take trolleys, scan clothes, tie up clothes hanger, hang clothes, lift goods, bake bread, take ice, slice fish, weigh goods, wash dishes, serve customer, pack the food)
Customer service assistant	Stack free gifts, refund stock, give away free gift to customer, assist complaints from customer
Receptionist	Print report price change, key in data, key dispose, print report closing
IT assistant	Receive goods, updating store records
Security	Search employee's body, guard main entrance and receiving area

In terms of the period of employment, 30 per cent joined the company up to 12 months ago, 19 per cent between 13 to18 months, 30 per cent between

19 to 24 months and another 21 per cent more than 24 months. Two third are paid between ¹⁴RM500 to RM750 per month while 28 per cent received RM751-RM1000 and only one diploma holder employee has a salary between RM1001 to RM1500 (Table 6.10).

Table 6.10 Salary and Period of Employment

	PERIOD OF EMPLOYMENT (months)						TOTAL
	<6	6-12	13-18	19-24	25-30	>30	
RM500-RM750	5	4	8	14	8	1	40 (70%)
RM751-RM1000	1	6	3	3	0	3	16 (28%)
RM1001-RM1500	1	0	0	0	0	0	1 (2%)
TOTAL	7 (12%)	10 (18%)	11 (19%)	17 (30%)	8 (14%)	4 (7%)	57 (100%)

As regards how those in supported employment viewed their jobs, more than 80 per cent believed they did basically the same job as other employees without disabilities, did the same thing every day of the week at work and did not supervise other employees. About two thirds reported that they had been transferred either to a different unit or department and did various tasks. However, the tasks assigned were mostly the same since, given the dominance of the sales assistant group where the routines were very common to all such positions.

¹⁴ Exchange rate for GBP1 is equal to RM4.96 in April 2011.

Finally, when asked about Disabled Employees Monthly Allowance (EPC), nine respondents stated they were not claiming when all were eligible to receive this as an incentive to work.

6.2.5 Family support

Turning to the family support experienced by employees with learning difficulties, the researcher is especially interested in living arrangements and journey to work. Nearly 70 per cent of the respondents were living with their families. About 20 per cent lived with their friends either in a private house or hostel provided by the company and 11 per cent were living alone.

The home-to-work distance is indicated to be less than 5km for 70 per cent of respondents. A third commuted to work by motorcycle or bicycle, 30 per cent by car, 20 per cent by public transport and 13 per cent on foot (Table 6.11). Two-thirds of those commute by car; motorcycle or bicycle was taken to and from their workplace by family members.

Table 6.11 Commute to the Workplace

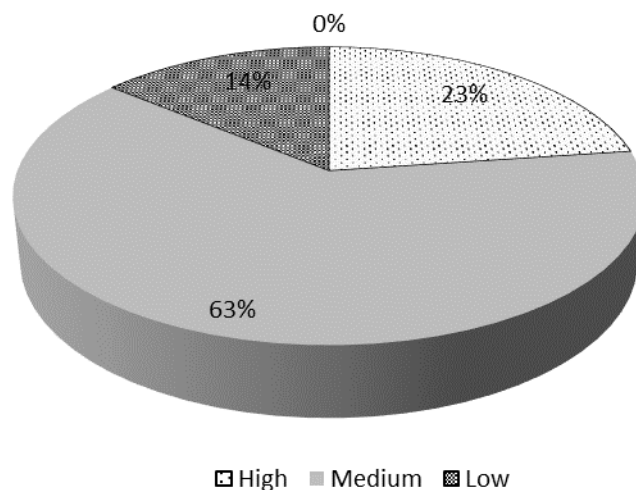
	Frequency	%
public transport (bus, train)	12	22
Car	17	31
motorcycle/ bicycle	19	34
Walking	7	13
Total	55	100
Missing	2	
Grand total	57	

6.2.6 Socio economic details

In order to explore further the respondents' background, they have been categorised into three classes of socio-economic status based on Malaysia

Standard Classification of Occupations 2008 (MASCO 2008) - low, middle and high- based on their parents' occupation. The finding shows that parents are largely from the middle socio-economic status with 63 per cent could be seen come from middle class family in which the parents are working as associate professionals. A quarter is from higher status whose parents hold professional or managerial positions, and 14 per cent are from low socio-economic status whose parents work as support workers (Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1 Socio-economic status



6.3 VIEWS ON EMPLOYMENT

This section describes the perceptions of respondents on their degree of 'happiness' in past and present employment, their satisfaction on their working experience and also their hopes for the future career development. In general, there is no significant difference between their socio-economic

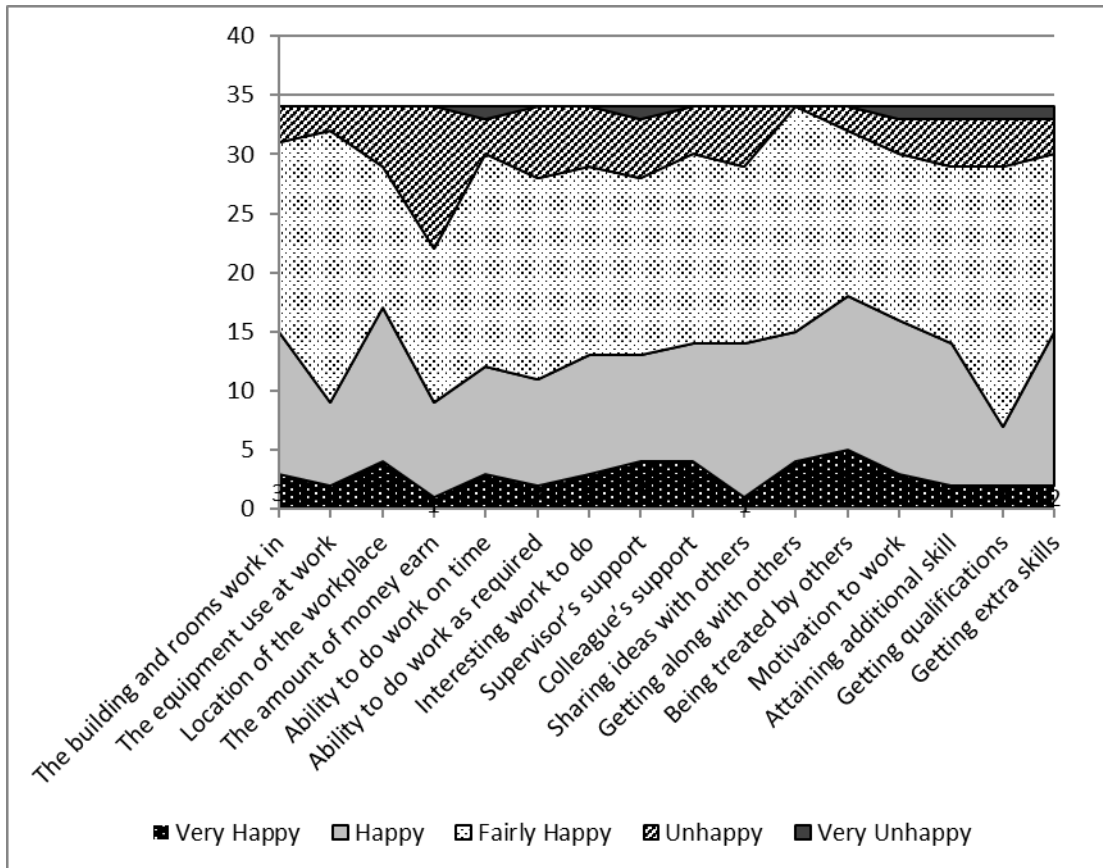
status and ethnicity in their happiness, satisfaction with current employment and hopes for future.

6.3.1 Happiness of respondents

The results of the study indicate that out of 57 respondents, only 34 reported to have had past employment experience. Therefore, in calculating the happiness of previous employment, sample of 34 are used in contrast to 57 for present employment.

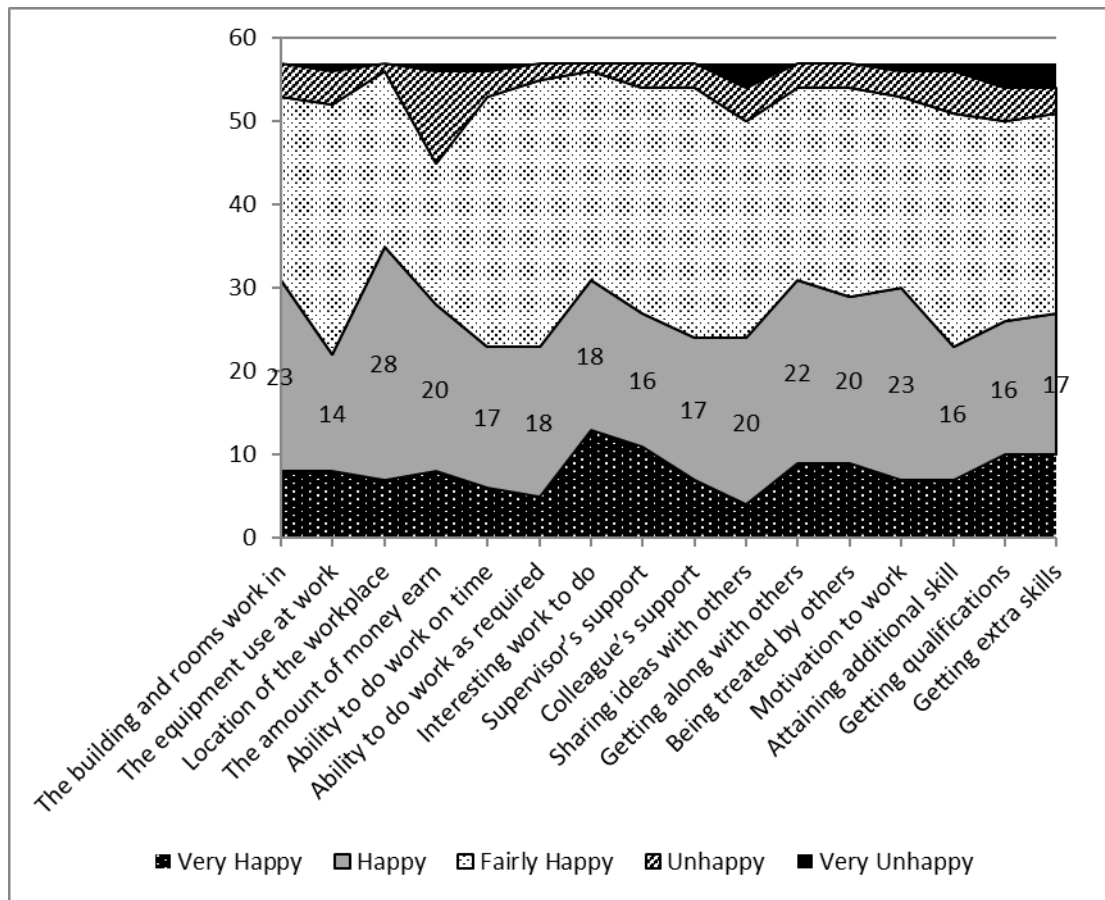
In general, mostly all reported fairly happy to very happy in both previous and current employment. In their previous employment, if we consider the responses of “very happy” and “happy”, respondents show their most happiness on “the location of the workplace” and “being treated by others” items. Conversely, the responses show the most “unhappy” with “the amount of money earn” in previous employment (Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2 Happiness of respondents in previous employment (n=34)



Correspondingly, in the current employment, more than half showed their happiness on “the location of the workplace”, “interesting work to do”, “getting along with others” and “motivation to work” items. On the other hand, the responses show the most “unhappy” with “the amount of money earns” and “sharing ideas with others” (Figure 6.3). However, overall, we can see the increase of the happiness in the current compared to the previous employment.

Figure 6.3 Happiness of respondents in current employment (n=57)



In order to analyse further the degree of happiness among respondents, mean ratings of happiness are calculated for each item -a rating of 5.0 represents “very happy” and a rating of 1.0, “very unhappy”. In general, while the mean ratings for all items in the current employment are greater than 3.3, only seven items have the mean ratings more than 3.3 in previous employment. In addition to the preceding Figure 6.2 and Figure 6.3, this finding shows an increase in all the items’ mean ratings except for the item of “being treated by others” (Table 6.12).

In addition, extracting from 16 items in the *Likert* Scale question, four sub scales have been constructed namely, physical attributes, capabilities and interest, support and social participation, and career development opportunities. Testing out between the four sub scales, only the sub scale of capabilities and interest ($Z=-2.15$, $p=.032$) shows a significant growth of happiness in the current employment compared to previous employment (Table 6.12).

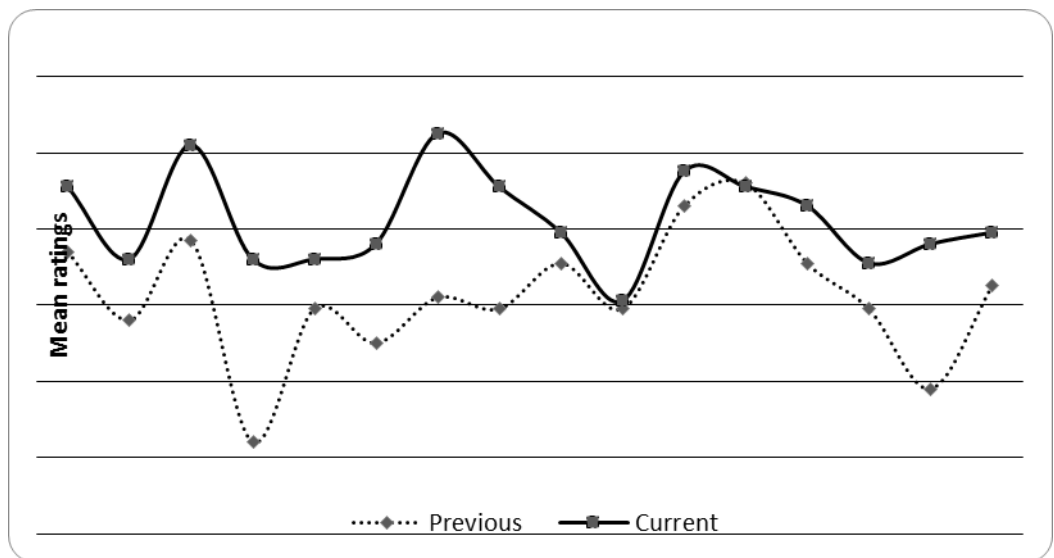
Table 6.12 Mean Ratings of Happiness Subscales

Subscales and items		Previous employment (n=34) Mean	Current employment (n=57) Mean
Physical attributes			
1	The building and rooms work in	3.44	3.61
2	The equipment use at work	3.26	3.42
3	Location of the workplace	3.47	3.72
4	The amount of money earn	2.94	3.42
Capabilities and interest*¹			
5	Ability to do work on time	3.29	3.42
6	Ability to do work as required	3.20	3.46
7	Interesting work to do	3.32	3.75* ²
Support and social participation			
8	Supervisor's support	3.29	3.61
9	Colleague's support	3.41	3.49
10	Sharing ideas with others	3.29	3.31
11	Getting along with others	3.56	3.65
12	Being treated by others	3.62	3.61
Career Development Opportunities			
13	Motivation to work	3.41	3.56
14	Attaining additional skill	3.29	3.41
15	Getting qualifications	3.08	3.46
16	Getting extra skills	3.35	3.49
<i>Note.</i> A mean rating of 5.0 represents "very happy" and 1.0, "very unhappy". * ¹ Significant difference between previous and current happiness $\square = .032$ * ² Significant difference between previous and current happiness $\square = .018$			

Moreover, a Wilcoxon Signed Rank test is conducted involving 34 respondents who have previous job experience to evaluate the impact of supported employment on employees' happiness. Their happiness increased

in their present job but there is no statistically significant difference between their happiness in previous employment and current employment ($Z = -1.874$, $p = .061$) (Figure 6.4). However, the item of “how interesting your work is” has a significant different ($Z = -2.364$, $p = .018$).

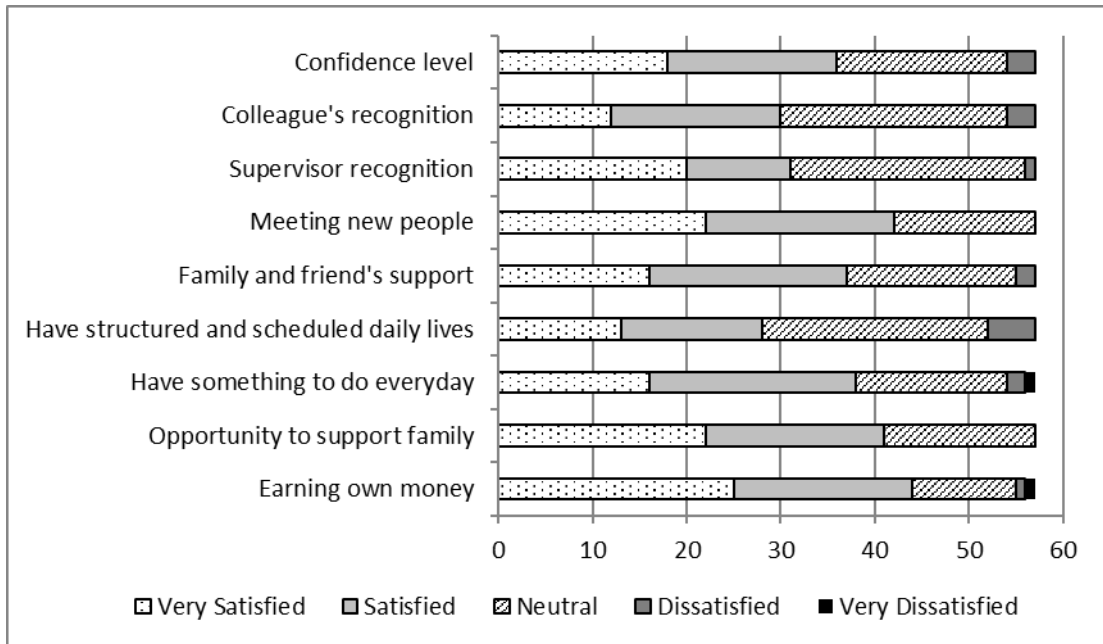
Figure 6.4 Comparison of respondents’ happiness for previous and current employment



6.3.2 Satisfaction on current employment

In measuring satisfaction with current employment, the data suggest that less than a half were very satisfied with their present job with highest satisfaction relating to ‘earning own money’, ‘opportunity to support family’ and ‘meeting new people’. Each of these three aspects record ‘general’ satisfaction (very satisfied plus satisfied) for over 75 per cent of respondents. General dissatisfaction (very dissatisfied plus dissatisfied) is at its highest for ‘colleagues’ and supervisor recognition’ and ‘having structured and scheduled daily lives’ (Figure 6.5).

Figure 6.5 Satisfaction on current employment



Again, mean ratings of satisfaction are calculated for each sub scale with a rating of 5.0 represents strong satisfaction and a rating of 1.0, dissatisfaction. To make it clearer, the items of satisfaction have been grouped into two sub scales; personal development, and support and recognition. The mean ratings for both sub-scales are above 3.4, showing positive satisfaction; “earning own money”, “meeting new people” and “opportunity to support family” show the highest items in personal development with means of 4.16, 4.12 and 4.11 respectively (Table 6.13). Whilst for the sub scale of support and recognition, the happiness in the three items is almost equal measure.

Table 6.13 Mean Ratings of Satisfaction Subscales (n=57)

Subscales and items		Psychological feelings Mean
Personal Development		
1	Earning own money	4.16
2	Opportunity to support family	4.11
3	Have something to do everyday	3.88
4	Have structured and scheduled daily lives	3.63
5	Confidence level	3.89
6	Meeting new people	4.12
Support and Recognition		
7	Support from family and friends relation to job	3.88
8	Supervisor's recognition on ability	3.68
9	Colleague's recognition on ability	3.89
<i>Note. A mean rating of 5.0 represents higher degree of satisfaction and 1.0, dissatisfaction.</i>		

6.3.3 Hopes for the future.

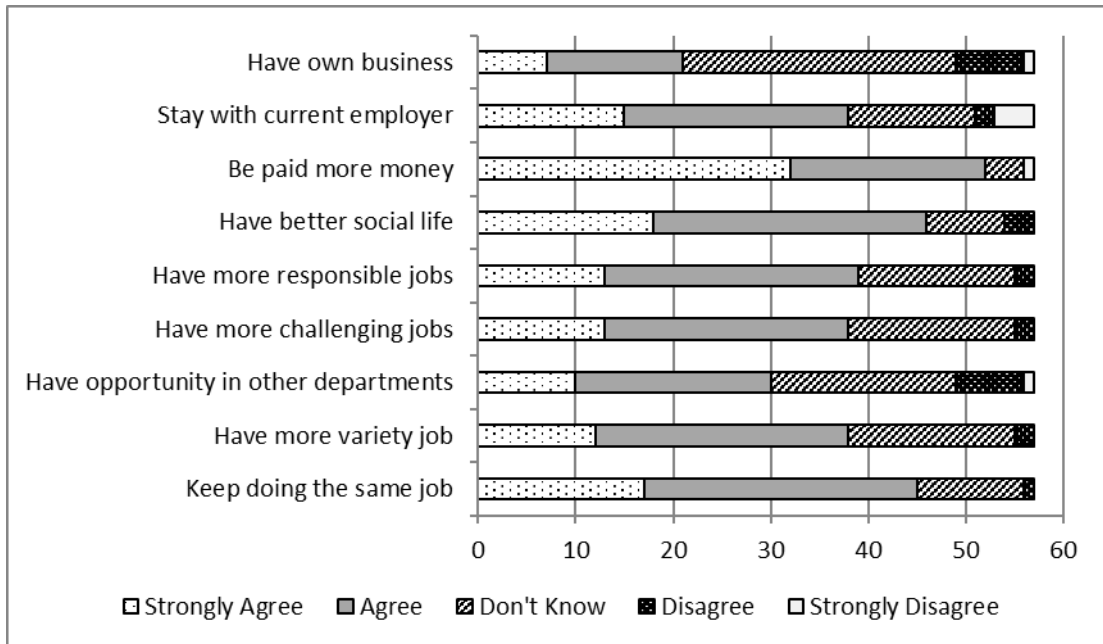
Generally, the respondents have put some dreams for their future prospects as the statistics show the high frequencies for each item. On top of that, no significant relationship could be seen between gender, ethnicity, age, and hopes for the future. The mean ratings are calculated to show the degree of agreement for each item. The mean ratings of all sub scales are higher than 3.3 whereas three items of “be paid more money”, “keep doing the same job” and “have better social life” were 4.44, 4.07 and 4.01 respectively signify their hopes for the future (Table 6.14).

Table 6.14 Mean Ratings of Future Hopes Subscales

		<u>Hopes for the future</u> Mean
Items		
1	Keep doing the same job	4.07
2	Have more variety job	3.84
3	Have opportunity in other	3.54
4	Have more challenging jobs	3.86
5	Have more responsible jobs	3.88
6	Have better social life	4.01
7	Be paid more money	4.44
8	Stay with current employer	3.75
9	Have own business	3.33
Note. A mean rating of 5.0 represents strong agreement and 1.0, disagreement		

Similarly, the data indicate the high percentages of “agree” and “strongly agree” in most items clearly signifies their agreement on the statement reflecting their future hopes, especially for the item “be paid more money” with 56 per cent “strongly agree” and 35 per cent “agree”. Alongside these findings is considerable doubt as to whether they might “have own business” in the future with 49 per cent chose “don’t know” for this item (Figure 6.6).

Figure 6.6 Hopes for the future



Besides, the percentages of ‘agree’ and ‘strongly agree’ are added up to specify the degree of general agreement on each item. The percentages show that 91 per cent hope for “better salary”, 87 per cent would like to “have more challenging works”, 81 per cent wish to “have a better social life at work” and 79 per cent want to t “keep doing the present job”. 68 per cent seek more responsibilities, 47 per cent, more variety in work, and 43 per cent would like to have the opportunity to work in other departments”. Despite 67 per cent wanting to “stay with current employer”, 37 per cent hope to start their own business.

6.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented general illustrations of employees with learning difficulties who participated in supported employment in BZ Corporation in

terms of their characteristics and their perceptions on their happiness, satisfaction and hopes for the future.

The first section showed that more respondents remarked upon their limitations in communication skills compared to other difficulties experienced in their daily routines. In terms of their literacy, since nearly all have basic education, they have no difficulties in terms of reading and writing in Malay or English or their mother tongue. Some of those employees who joined this supported employment did so freshly graduated from school or training institution. About 37 per cent of respondents did not have any previous job experience.

In general, it could be concluded that the opportunities given for them to work in supported employment have given them happier lives, especially with more monetary rewards and social inclusion in the community, although some employees mentioned their unhappiness, and a few stated their dissatisfaction with the salary received. Many have become accustomed to the daily routine and this has given them a vision of their future lives with more challenging and exciting tasks to perform so as to show their capabilities.

CHAPTER 7
**GROUP INTERVIEWS WITH EMPLOYEES WITH LEARNING
DIFFICULTIES**

7.1 INTRODUCTION

As mentioned at the end of the previous chapter, the overall aim of this chapter is to focus in greater detail on the experiences of persons with learning difficulties as they joined supported employment. This chapter presents key findings obtained from six group interviews carried out with employees with learning difficulties in BZ Corporation with the aim of discovering their understanding on their individual abilities and limitations in *relation* to joining supported employment as well as to examine their perspectives on their experiences of the supported employment scheme.

This chapter firstly presents the respondents' characteristics before discussing the findings of the interviews. There are 23 respondents, of whom 18 were male and 5 female involved in the group interviews. They are from a range of ethnic backgrounds- eleven are Malays, eight are Chinese, three are Indians and one is mixed heritage. All respondents are single and aged between 20 to 37 years old. For the purposes of the group interviews, they were divided into six groups according to their workplace with each group comprising employees from two or three outlets (Table 1).

The majority attended the special education programme with only five having been enrolled in mainstream school. Two thirds were put forward for the current job by non-governmental organisations (NGOs); five were suggested by their teacher from special education school, two through Labour

Department (LD) and another two by word of mouth through friends. Twenty of them had been employed at BZ Corporation between two to three years and two for a year. One of the employees had been with this employer since 1999, eight years before the launch of the supported employment scheme by the company in 2007 (Table 1).

The majority of 20 employees were employed as Sales Assistants while two worked as Customer Service Assistants and one as Admin Assistant. Almost all lived with their families; and the remaining three stayed in a hostel. More than half went to work on their own, either by bus, car, and motorcycle or on foot. A quarter was taken to and from their workplace by family members (Table 1).

Figure 7.1 General Description of Group Interviews Respondents

GROUP NO	RESPONDENTS (Pseudonyms)	SEX	ETHNICITY	AGE	EDUCATION HISTORY	WAY OF GETTING JOB	DATE OF JOINED	JOB POSITION	GO TO WORK
1	Mei	Female	Chinese	27	Special education	NGO	Sept 2007	Sales Assistant	Bus/ family
	Choo	Male	Chinese	34	Mainstream school	Friend	April 1999	Sales Assistant	Family
	Chee	Male	Chinese	38	Mainstream school	NGO	Sept 2007	Customer Service	Family
	Salim	Male	Malay	24	Special education	School	March 2008	Sales Assistant	Family
	Farid	Male	Malay	23	Special education	School	March 2008	Sales Assistant	Bus/ family
2	Michael	Male	Chinese	35	Mainstream school	NGO	Feb 2009	Sales Assistant	Walking
	Siva	Male	Indian	33	Special education	NGO	March 2008	Sales Assistant	Bus
	Lunar	Male	Indian	23	Special education	NGO	Dec 2008	Sales Assistant	Family
	Mary	Female	Others	37	Mainstream school	NGO	June 2008	Sales Assistant	Walking
	Jo	Male	Chinese	22	Special education	NGO	June 2008	Sales Assistant	Bus/Family
3	Alif	Male	Malay	25	Special education	LD	Oct 2008	Customer Service	Driving Car
	Chia	Female	Chinese	35	Mainstream school	NGO	March 2008	Sales Assistant	Walking
	Liew	Male	Chinese	26	Special education	NGO	March 2008	Sales Assistant	Walking
4	Mano	Male	Indian	23	Special education	NGO	Jan 2008	Sales Assistant	Family
	Iskandar	Male	Malay	23	Special education	LD	Feb 2009	Sales Assistant	Bus
	Fahmi	Male	Malay	27	Special education	NGO	Nov 2007	Sales Assistant	Bus
	Salleh	Male	Malay	23	Special education	Friend	Jan 2008	Sales Assistant	Bus
5	Zahar	Male	Malay	23	Special education	NGO	Feb 2008	Sales Assistant	Family
	Chua	Male	Chinese	25	Special education	NGO	May 2008	Sales Assistant	Bus
	Ahmad	Male	Malay	27	Special education	NGO	June 2008	Sales Assistant	Motorcycle
6	Ismail	Male	Malay	24	Special education	School	Nov 2008	Admin Assistant	Walk (Hostel)
	Laila	Female	Malay	24	Special education	School	Nov 2008	Sales Assistant	Walk (Hostel)
	Azreen	Female	Malay	24	Special education	School	Nov 2008	Sales Assistant	Walk (Hostel)

The interviews were conducted in Malay language and were later transcribed and translated for analysis. This chapter will firstly explore the knowledge, understanding and opinions of the employees with learning difficulties about their personal strengths and limitations to participate in supported employment before further describing their experiences in this supported employment scheme. The discussion is supported by illustrative quotations from the interview transcripts to offer a possibility for the reader to understand the reality of respondents' experiences in supported employment.

7.2 PERSONAL STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS IN RELATION TO EMPLOYMENT

Data from the interviews show that the majority of respondents were willing to reflect on their abilities in relation to work in supported employment. Most also demonstrated a high level of awareness of what they saw as their strengths and weaknesses. They were able to reflect most questions introduced by the researcher.

The fact that they had been selected by teachers or coaches at training centers or sheltered workshops to apply for the current job is seen as recognition of their ability to participate in supported employment as illustrated in the quotes below:

*"My teacher chose me and him. Only two of us. Others can't talk. They can't do work properly. Only the good ones can work here."
(Chia)*

"I went to the interview. But not all got the job. I am better than them. I got the job" (Iskandar)

This recognition was taken by the respondents as confirming their capacity to work compared to their other friends at the training centre or sheltered workshop. Moreover, several claimed that they have similar abilities as other non-disabled workers as stated by Jo,

"We are the same. People always consider me the same as other ordinary people" (Jo)

Reflecting on whether they were more able than their other friends in the training centre, a number of respondents, however, believed that their friends are also competent to do a similar job. They drew attention to the fact that it is necessary to prove their competency in order to be selected to join supported employment. Chee highlighted that,

"I think my other friends also can do this job. But they have to ask the teacher first. If the teacher finds that they are capable enough, she will bring them here too" (Chee)

This quote highlights the necessity for the persons with learning difficulties having first to prove their ability to the teachers in order to be chosen as the right candidate to join the employment scheme.

On the other hand, a number of the participants emphasised what they saw as their limitations or difficulties. Liew, for example, repeatedly stresses his inability to read and Chee describes the constraints he faced in getting a job,

"it is not easy to get a job to us. We are 'slow'. If I was just like everyone else, I will easily get a job. Every company wants people who have the qualifications. We do not have that" (Chee)

With regard to their limitations, all respondents expressed their thankfulness to be given an opportunity to have a secure job with a good salary. Jo, for instance stated,

“...before working with the company, I have no future career. Thank God that I have the opportunity to work here. I feel so relieved” (Jo)

Liew, mindful of his illiteracy, added to this showing his acceptance of any kinds of job offered to him saying,

“I am so fortunate. This company gave me the opportunity to work. I can't read. So, I can't be too choosy. Just accept it. It is too difficult to find a job nowadays” (Liew)

It can be seen from the above quotations that while others are proud of their strengths and abilities, a few showed their awareness of their limitations in fulfilling the job. Thus, the opportunities offered to them made them realise a need to be thankful.

7.3 EXPERIENCES IN SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

Another aim of the study is to look into how supported employment is implemented in BZ Corporation. In this section, the discussion will be based on themes that emerged from the accounts of employees with learning difficulties on their experiences throughout the recruitment processes, in relation to the practice of policies and support in the company, contact with non-disabled workers and customers, satisfaction on the job and changes in their daily lived experience linked with employment in this context.

7.3.1 Recruitment process

Referring to the selection made by their teachers or trainers prior to the employment process, nearly half of the respondents believed that the decision to try to enter employment is not truly their choice. They believed that the decision as to whether they are ready to work or not lies in the hands of teachers or trainers. In a small number of cases, respondents described the decision to work as being made by their parents. Michael said,

*“My father contacted Malaysian Care and then registered me.. I got the interview and my father brought me to the interview”
(Michael)*

Some also discussed the fact that they did not see it as their decision as to whether once employed, they should remain in the job. Although they feel like quitting, they are forbidden to do so. Salim pointed out,

“My mum asked me to take this job. Whenever I told her I want to quit, she said not to. She said what I am going to eat if I don't work” (Salim)

There were, however, four respondents who described how they had made the decision to work and had searched for the job themselves through the employment services or friends. Iskandar and Alif reported that they contacted Labour Department when they saw the vacancy advertised on television while Salleh and Choo informed that they were introduced to the scheme by their friends who were already in the scheme and encouraged to apply for the job.

All respondents shared similar experiences of going through an interview process implemented by the company before being accepted as members of

staff. Once offered a position in the company, they were given a two-week special training course intended to provide them with basic technical skills associated with a variety of tasks. The interesting of this training was believed to be to give an elementary understanding of their duties and to give them opportunities to have a trial work experience in which they are tested to determine a suitable placement according to their abilities.

In terms of the decision about where they should be placed in the company, a small number of employees remarked that they were also encouraged to express their interests and preference. Mei, for instance revealed,

“They asked me. I said I like to fold the clothes. It is easy for me. I don’t want to do something difficult” (Mei)

Iskandar also shared his experience of stating his preference to the management,

“Last time, I was a cashier. When I knew there is a vacancy at GMS¹⁵, I asked the management to be sales assistant there. If we want to transfer, we have to tell the management” (Iskandar)

Despite this, some were of the view that their wishes were not always taken into account in relation to the first job they were given and also as to whether they were allowed to stay somewhere where they had been placed. Jo mentioned stating a preference but because it was not seen as being within his capacity, it was not granted,

¹⁵ GMS is an abbreviation of a section in the outlet known as General Merchandise Section

“I told them I want to be an artist¹⁶. But when I can’t do my job...they advised me to transfer to GMS” (Jo)

On a similar point, Chee testified that sometimes transfers between departments may be regarded as appropriate on account of the ability or performance of the employee. Sharing his experience, he noted,

“...they asked me which department I like most. So, I chose to do groceries. But this customer service, I don’t even think that I can work here. Only because I have a fall, they transferred me here. If not, I will still be in groceries” (Chee)

7.3.2 Support and policies

In response to the support given by the employer, respondents reported that they were provided with a ‘buddy’ from the first day they joined the company. A ‘buddy’ is understood to be their immediate supervisor who assists them in fulfilling their duties. This buddy system is described by James that,

“On my first day, my supervisor taught me how to fold the clothes...where to put it” (James)

It is also added by Mei,

“If I don’t know what to do, I’ll ask her (supervisor). If I want to go to the ladies, I’ll ask her too” (Mei)

However, this support is seen as not always perceived as effective since a number of respondents reported that they had only very limited interaction with their supervisors and were usually left alone without any guidance:

¹⁶ Artist in this context is a person who is responsible to design or decorate the outlet based on any special occasion or celebration, for instance for the Christmas Sale.

“On my first day, my supervisor brought me to my department. I have to do my job alone” (Mei)

“I lost my way on my first day. I wasn’t familiar with the floor so I didn’t know where to go” (Chee)

“I always do my work alone. Nobody helps me to find the clothes. I can’t ask my supervisor as he always busy. Having meetings. The customer always makes noise when I can’t find the cloth” (Michael)

Another policy mentioned by respondents was the identification system introduced by the company. Every disabled employee is provided with a disabled tag to be worn at the workplace. Respondents had various opinions on the application of this tag, but the majority agreed on its importance to identify them as "special". Some are aware that customers will be more tolerant and have different expectations if they see the tag. Therefore, they sometimes used the tag as a form of protection as described by Siva,

“If I can’t find the clothes the customer wants, I’ll show my card. They will be more patient with me....” (Siva)

On the other hand, several declared their refusal to wear the tag because others would tease them knowing that they were part of the group of employees with learning difficulties. For example, Chia said,

“They know that I am disabled. They scold me as if I don’t have feelings” (Chia).

In terms of company policy, some respondents drew attention to the fact that the company was said to restrict disabled employees to working only on the morning shift instead of both shifts. From the point of view of the disabled employee, this seems to restrict their opportunities to increase their salary. Because the afternoon shift does not end until midnight, the rate of pay is higher. Once they have proven their efficiency in carrying out their duties,

some feel confident to work in the afternoon shift or perform additional duties. They are, however, prevented by company policy from doing night shifts and overtime. Jo pointed out,

"..actually, I want to work in the afternoon shift...but because I am disabled, I can't" (Jo)

7.3.3 Contact with non-disabled employees and customers

Data from the interviews showed that most employees were delighted to have an opportunity to join the company. They were generally pleased with their co-workers and supervisors who were portrayed as being helpful and as treating them well. Aiman said that,

"I like my supervisor. He is so kind. He always advises me..." and Mary also said, "I can get along with my other colleagues... they are all kind-hearted" (Aiman)

Although they were pleased about these attitudes, not all were confident enough to have social contact with non-disabled colleagues even those in the same department. Only three employees described interacting comfortably with other employees, having lunch together and sometimes meeting outside work. For some, however, socialising with some groups of non-disabled employees was described as complicated. Jo informed about his difficulty in mixing with some groups and of feeling left out:

"I have many friends. In the morning, I will have my breakfast with the cashiers. Ladies. They asked me to follow them as they know what the best food for me is. In the afternoon, I go with groceries [sales assistants]. But always be friend with ladies only. If the guys don't want to go with me, I don't care. I am not a child anymore. I am an adult." (Jo)

Most employees were cautious about taking the first step to start a social interaction afraid of being rejected. Some said that initiating social interaction is not spontaneous for them as they felt awkward to converse with their colleagues. Mei said,

*“...during the working hours, I seldom speak or chat with other employees at my department... I don’t know what to talk about”
(Mei)*

Accordingly, their social interactions with either supervisors or co-workers were described as being limited mainly to conversations about their work tasks. The accounts of the majority indicated that they continue to accomplish their job without having much social contact at all. Chee indicated that,

“I rarely talk with my supervisor. Only if I am confused about doing something, I’ll ask him” (Chee)

Moreover, their accounts of their working lives revealed a considerable amount of isolation as they went about their daily routines at the workplace. One indicator of this is that nearly all of them have their lunch alone as Faiz said,

“I eat at the food court but alone... other employees have their own group” (Faiz)

Some said that they preferred to be alone and to avoid having social contact. Liew stated his preference for being alone particularly in view of his discomfort at being asked about life,

“I eat alone. I don’t like to be with others. I don’t like to commit...asking about my father...my mother...no need...why they want to know?” (Liew)

Michael gave a different reason for wanting to eat alone. Being a good time keeper was important and he was aware that for most of them having lunch in a group took more time. Michael asserted that he does not want to be behind schedule as this portrays a bad attitude. Hence, he prefers to eat alone as he said,

"I eat at the restaurant. I don't like to eat with others. It will take so long. Chatting and talking. I am afraid I will be late to go back to work"(Michael)

Furthermore, since most denied to have friendship with non-disabled people before joining supported employment, they reported their difficulties to have a social contact with non-disabled employees. Therefore, most said to be friends with other colleagues with the same difficulties. Mei, Choo and Chee who work in the same workplace usually have their lunch together as the following quotes suggest:

"During the working hours, I seldom speak or chat with other employees at my department. I have my lunch usually either alone or with Choo or Chee. After the break, I'll continue folding the clothes" (Mei)

"I have my breakfast at home and usually have my lunch at the food court with Mei and Chee. I don't mix with others except these two" (Choo)

"My other colleagues have their lunch at the customer service counter. They have their own group already. I eat at the food court. Three of us (Mei and Choo)" (Chee)

Having only limited social contact is regarded as necessary for a small number of respondents since they said that they need to give priority to their work. Iskandar, for instance, talked of his preference for completing work tasks rather than interacting with other people. He mentioned that,

"Now we have to appreciate our job and do our best. We have to concentrate doing our job. Before [in sheltered homes] we got more time to spend with friends. Here [current job] we need to do our job to compete with others"(Iskandar)

This is supported by Mary,

"I don't talk much with other employees. I am so busy with my work. If I talk with them, I can't finish my job" (Mary)

While the majority commented on the degree of acceptance they felt they had been shown by colleagues, some situations portrayed by the respondents illustrate a form of rejection among colleagues and supervisors as experienced by Siva,

"I have been dismissed from the company by my supervisor. She always scolds me. She said I can't do the job as she wants. I have done my job. I don't know what I did wrong. But I think she don't like me" (Siva)

Likewise, Jo expressed his dissatisfaction:

"Some people said we (disabled employees) are slow in doing our job. They do better job. But we get the same salary. We are slow in the past. But now we are efficient. What's wrong with that?"(Jo)

A few respondents related how they had experienced instances of bullying; as Azreen noted,

"they (the non-disabled employees) always teased us...saying that we can't do the job...when I try to lodge a complaint, some will say that I always grumble even for a small problem" (Azreen)

The participants who have experienced this sort of behavior discussed how they managed these painful experiences by ignoring them or by seeming not to take them seriously. For example, Lunar said,

"The company staffs always tease disabled employees. Sometimes they bullied us. But I just regard as if they are just joking" (Lunar)

From those experiences revealed, it is apparent that some employees with learning difficulties demonstrated to have limited social contact with other non-disabled. Regardless of this discouraging experience with other non-disabled employees, they expressed their pleasure to have helpful and Cooperation colleagues in the company.

In response to their contact with customers, most respondents highlighted unfavourable experiences. James recalled,

"The customer always makes noise when I can't find the cloth...he said I am not good at work. I don't like it" (James)

Chua gave a specific example of in relation to a customer and a child,

"I have a problem with the customer...about a bicycle...the boy kept on playing with the bicycle...I am afraid it will be damaged. I asked him to put it back. His mother shouted at me. She even swore on me" (Chua)

Some respondents talked of facing negative attitudes on the part of customers who held misconceptions about their capacity both to learn and to perform tasks. Iskandar expressed how much he disliked bad treatment from customers,

"I don't like customers who scold. I can't find the shirt size. They said I don't know how to do my job. But I keep silent. My supervisor told her I am a slow learner But, she kept making a noise" (Iskandar)

Alif also described how he reacted when a customer became angry with him,

"...when the customer yelled at me, I feel so frustrated and upset. I cried. I didn't know what to do. I was so confused" (Alif)

Some described losing their tempers in the face of criticism from customers,

"I was told off. I am so angry. I throw the sticky tape. I was so cross." (Farid).

Regardless of the fact that most respondents described negative experiences with customers another group of respondents spoke of the positive feedback and recognition they had received. For example, Chee said,

"Some customer do praise...tell me that I am honest and trustworthy in doing the refund. They wrote in the comment form" (Chee)

In short, the findings from the interviews seemed to illustrate that while some of respondents have positive experiences with non-disabled employees and customers, other group of respondents have their negative experiences: indeed some will have both positive and negative experiences.

7.3.4 Satisfactions on the jobs

In response to their commitment to the current work, respondents seemed to express their satisfaction. Most said that they were not interested in finding any job other than their current jobs. Almost all stated that they will remain with their current jobs, but there were a variety of reasons for this decision. Some reported enjoying the job and doing the regular tasks. Choo explained,

"I love working here. I like doing this job and I don't want to change this job (Choo)

Others enjoyed the job for the social contacts and friendships as illustrated by Chia,

"I like working here. I got many friends. I don't want to find other job" (Chia)

There was no indication that the majority regarded the work as tedious or boring and a number said that they were willing to stay in the job indefinitely Mei said,

"I want to work here and do the same job until I retire" (Mei)

Another significant factor that appeared to influence the decision to decide not to change from the familiar tasks and go to other different department seemed to be to do with feeling comfortable with the job that they had. Several respondents who felt settled in their present job said that they were reluctant to do something different which requires them to learn something new. This reluctance was at least in part related to the fact that in a new job, they would have to deal with the unfamiliarity and complexity they remembered facing at the initial stage of the employment. Mary for instance asserted,

"When I first started the job, it is difficult for me. But now, it is easy. I don't want to change the job anymore. Otherwise, I have to start again" (Mary)

A further reason given for staying in the jobs they have relates to their awareness of the lack of employment opportunities opened for them. They show their understanding to have restrictions to prosper from their career lives because of their impairments. While Zahar indicated the difficulty of

getting an employment, *“it is hard to get a job out there”*, Chia asserted that, *“only (the company’s name) want to employ us”*.

In addition, positive recognition from those around them as well as pressure from the family and supervisors to stay where they were, appeared to be reasons for them to continue in their present employment, as the following quotes suggest:

“I like working here. They give a good service. My boss always gives me a treat because I did a good job” (Jo)

“Sometimes when meeting with my aunts, my mother told them that I now have a job. They are really impressed that a disabled person like me can have a job” (Iskandar)

“I have to stay. My brother won’t allow me to work at other place” (Faizal)

These quotes illustrate some of the respondents’ perceptions of their jobs, why they appreciate them and some of their reasons for not looking elsewhere. The respondents’ accounts indicate that they believe that they should be thankful to get the job and should stay with their current employer. Moreover, a number do not want to change their types of job as they are comfortable with their routine. Most spoke positively about working in the best way they could and some talked about taking the initiative to improve them. Jo, for instance tried to get new ideas in organising bags from other retail centres to impress his boss with his ability:

“Whenever I went to other shopping complexes as the Mid Valley, KLCC, Jaya Jusco, or other hyper market, I would try to see how they stack the bags. And I will try to copy the style. When the boss comes and sees, they will feel happy with me” (Jo)

Despite their positive feelings about the job and motivation to develop, some were aware of the fact that they were viewed by people who knew them as having a low-status job. This negative judgment sometimes humiliates them as Iskandar said,

“some people said that working at a supermarket is not standard. When I go to work, I don’t wear the uniform. I put it in my bag. Only after arriving at the workplace, I change my uniform. I don’t want people to know I am working here” (Iskandar)

Apart from those who appeared to be very keen to continue their present job, there are three respondents who are really determined and motivated to see themselves in a better position in the future. Jo believed in his dream and tried to achieve it by attending courses,

“...actually, I want to be an artist¹⁷. But my boss said I am not talented. So, I have to learn first. Now, every Saturday I go to the art class. I pay RM75 per month”(Jo)

Moreover, he believed that the experience gathered from the company will give him a chance to get a better position in future,

“I just want to work here for five years...after that I think I want to transfer to other hypermarket. I got much experience here. So, I can ask better pay” (Jo)

Similarly, Alif and Ahmad whose ambition to be a librarian and a mechanic respectively expressed their intention to quit if they manage to get the jobs

¹⁷ Artist in this context is a person who is responsible to design or decorate the outlet based on any special occasion or celebration, for instance for the Christmas Sale.

they hoped for. This shows their commitment to show their abilities and at the same time make social and economic progress.

7.3.5 Changes in their daily lived experience

In sharing their experiences of participating in supported employment, a number of respondents related the changes that have occurred in their daily lives after joining the company and the impact that some of these have had. Jo, for instance mentioned that holding on to this permanent job confirms his ability to work and accordingly, increases his self-confidence level. Liew pointed to the importance of having a structured and organised life:

*“Before, I just stay at home. But now I have my own schedule”
(Liew)*

Moreover, comparing their current salary with their previous jobs, either in sheltered workshop or other open employment, the current job offers were regarded as offering better conditions as described by Mano,

“the salary here is better. Last time I only got RM50. Now I got RM650” (Mano)

Finally, some also expressed their satisfaction with the social inclusion offered in the company which satisfies their social needs of having friends.

For example, Chia said,

“I like working here. I have many friends. That is why I like working here” (Chia)

Regardless of the strong views about the extent to which respondents had improved their personal development in terms of confidence level, organised way of life, financial independence and making friends through supported

employment, many respondents also discussed their continued dependency on family support. Despite various kinds of support provided by their families, the respondents only spoke of their reliance on the family support in terms of living arrangement, commuting to work and managing their salary.

It seems that while respondents in this study have a secure job and are financially independent, it is clear that all but three live with their families. While for commuting to work, nearly half go to work with their family. Others reported going to work by themselves either by driving a car, riding a bike, using public transport or going on foot.

In terms of the management of their salaries, a quarter of the respondents said that they did not know the amount of their wages. In fact, Chua said, "*I never check the pay slips*" and Liew thought that it is futile to look at pay slip: "*I do not want to see. If I see something on paper, my eyes will hurt*". About three quarters of the respondents did not know how to withdraw money from the bank and left this to their families. Farid described what happened in his case,

"My mother withdraws the money. She writes a note every time I take the money. Sometimes I finish my salary. So, I have to pay her back" (Farid)

Around the same proportion of respondents reported that their parents generally had considerable control over their wages. They described that they were given pocket money on a daily or weekly basis. Salim for example stated,

"my mum gave me RM5 a day for me to buy food. If I want to buy something else, new jeans or t-shirt, I asked her for more. I do not know the balance" (Salim)

Choo similarly affirmed that she had to ask for permission to spend money,

"my father gave me the money. Sometimes RM20. Sometimes RM50. When finished, I asked him (money)" (Choo)

Nevertheless, not everyone was completely dependent on their parents or family in terms of money management. Alif, for instance, is given a total freedom in handling his salary. Ismail, Laila and Azreen who lived in the hostel also manage their own money.

Despite others largely controlling how their money should be spent, all respondents talked about understanding that their parents are doing the best for them, including saving money for their future security. Though living with their parents, all of them believe that their family would not use their money for family expenditure. Mary for instance, totally trusts her parents:

"My mum takes my salary. I don't know how to withdraw. But not all. She gives me small amount only. When it finishes, she gives again. She doesn't write how much she has given me. I trust her. She won't take my money." (Mary)

However, other respondents described the situation differently. Although he appreciated the reasons why his parents wished to control his money, Jo expressed his wish to have a freedom of choice to in spending his salary,

"Sometimes I feel I want to save my own money. It's my salary. But my mum afraid that I won't save it and be spendthrift. She said that my salary is for my future saving" (Jo)

7.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter discusses the reflections of persons with learning difficulties on their abilities to work and their experiences of a variety of aspects of being in employment. In general, most of the respondents feel proud that their abilities were recognised by those they regarded to be in positions of power such as parents, teachers, trainers and employers. Teachers at school or trainers at the sheltered workshop were regarded as having full power in selecting the best candidates among other students or trainees to join supported employment. Being selected to join supported employment means a lot to them demonstrating that they have acquired a certain level of abilities to distinguish them from other persons with more severe learning difficulties besides enabling them to compete with other non-disabled employees in supported employment. This recognition is considered as giving aspirations for them to show their competencies and is understood to be an important element in order to get the job and be placed in any department of the workplace.

Regardless of believing in their abilities, they are aware of their limitations and weaknesses especially in having no specific qualifications to apply for the job. Therefore, they accepted whatever jobs were offered to them and tried their best to show good attitudes at work and be loyal to the employer to express their thankfulness.

Concentrating on the lived experience of employees with learning difficulties, the situation described provides a diversity of views and experience which

indicates the limitation of control they have of their own lives. It is shown that they had limited freedom in the decision to work or to remain in the job once employed. Even their participation in the selection and recruitment were restricted to the decision of the employer. In addition, their dependency on family support could be seen in their limitation to deal with common tasks of daily living such as managing their money. Moreover, they seem to have no clear control on their future lives.

However, there are a small group of employees with learning difficulties who show they have an appropriate amount of control in their lives. Four of them got the job by their own initiative either through employment agencies or through friends' recommendations. This group also is not totally dependent on their family in the daily lives as compared to others.

In addition to the support from their families, support and policies provided by the employers, such as having the 'buddy system' and identification of disabled tag, were regarded as helping and assisting them to adapt to the new work environment. However, the disabled tag policy was given various opinions from employees. Being used as self-protection, some regarded the tag as giving a label to them which is negatively rejected.

Despite enjoying the opportunities to have social contact and friendship with other non-disabled employees, complicated experience in social inclusion was proven in which only a small number of employees with learning difficulties described having comfortable interactions with other non-disabled employees or customers. While most described having limited interactions

and having a better friendship with other employees who have similar disabilities.

Having finished with the perceptions of the recipients of supported employment, the next three chapters will turn to focus on the perceptions and opinions of three key groups involved with the services for persons with disabilities in Malaysia starting with government officials in Chapter 8.

CHAPTER 8
**GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS' PERSPECTIVES ON PERSONS WITH
LEARNING DIFFICULTIES AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT**

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of chapters 8, 9 and 10 is to present findings from the individual interviews of respondents representing three main parties - government, employer and non-government organisations (NGOs). These three sets of viewpoints are analysed and discussed separately so that the reader can relate the findings to the source of the data. Views from each side are divided into three major categories: persons with learning difficulties, the assistance and support offered to encourage employment participation for this group and their knowledge and awareness of supported employment. These categories are then divided into different themes and sub-themes according to their responses.

This chapter is concerned with the perspectives of government officials. The findings reported in the chapter are based on the information collected through the individual interviews with six officials from three government agencies – Development for Persons with Disabilities Department (DPwDD), Special Education Division (SED) and Labour Department (LD) – which have responsibilities in relation to persons with disabilities and also two officials from an international agency, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) which is currently collaborating with SWD in a project concerning this group.

There are five male and three female respondents who hold high positions with experience of between 10 to 36 years working in their organisations (Table 8.1). Their names, however, are changed to pseudonyms in order to retain confidentiality. In view of their having responsibilities in particular areas, it is common for them to refer to their positions in government departments when they are addressing particular issues. In order to protect their confidentiality, however, and to prevent their comments being linked to individuals, the specific job titles of the respondents are not given.

Table 8.1 Details of Respondents (Government Officials)

Code	Respondents (Pseudonyms)	Sex	Age (years)	Ethnicity	Agency	Working experience (years)
GOV1	Yusoff	Male	55	Malay	LD	37
GOV2	Zakaria	Male	42	Malay	LD	18
GOV3	Normah	Female	55	Malay	DPwDD	36
GOV4	Farah	Female	38	Malay	DPwDD	10
GOV5	Harun	Male	45	Malay	SED	22
GOV6	Nisah	Female	47	Malay	SED	25
GOV7	Keigo	Male	44	Japanese	JICA	20
GOV8	Mitsui	Male	42	Japanese	JICA	18

The interviews were conducted either in Malay or English depending on the respondents' preference. They were transcribed word-for-word in the language spoken but the coding process was completed in the English language.

8.2 KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF PERSONS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

This section will, firstly, discuss the respondents' general understanding of disability issues in Malaysia before proceeding to look at their understanding

and perspectives on the capacity of persons with learning difficulties to join supported employment. It should be noted, however, that in discussing their understanding of disability issues, the civil servant concentrated on the broad discussion of their departmental-related policy and have different areas of interest. Their responses often appear to be related to their departmental responsibilities.

8.2.1 Understanding disability issues in Malaysia

In general, disability is not considered as an entirely new issue to be debated in the country since disabled people have been seriously supported since the early 20th century before the independence of Malaysia in 1957 as discussed in Chapter 2. Normah from DPwDD who has 36 years of experience in the department shared information about the long history of disability policy and provision in the country. She reported that issues of persons with disabilities were previously under the supervision of Social Welfare Department (SWD) which has a special division dealing with disability- Disabled People Unit - along with welfare services for other vulnerable groups such as older people, women and children. From her observations, disability issues which have been the responsibility of the department since 1946 had more of a welfare rather than a rights orientation. Furthermore, the approaches taken by the government were described as focusing on providing rehabilitation and benefits.

While they had the responsibility for providing welfare-related assistance for persons with disabilities, this group was said to be given a very low priority

compared to others. To make it worse, Normah depicted the community in general to be unresponsive on disability issues due to their ignorance. Any issue related to disability was reported to be directly connected to the SWD. Therefore, disability issues for her were regarded as a neglected area, which was dumped on the SWD without full support from other related departments. A similar comment was expressed by Zakaria from LD who reflected on the association of disability to SWD:

“When we talked about persons with disabilities, obviously people will relate them with Social Welfare [Department]. Though other departments have their own responsibilities, people will be still associated [persons with disabilities]with [Social] welfare [Department]” (Zakaria)

A lack of interest among the public and the administrators was assumed by a few respondents to have led to the low registration among persons with disabilities with the SWD. In common with people with other categories of impairments, Normah reported that there were only a small number of registrations recorded among persons with learning difficulties. She commented that this low registration was thought to be due to a lack of awareness among parents. Farah added that being formally labelled with a ‘mental disorder’ and therefore, disclosing their children’s impairments to the public, humiliated them. Therefore, they tended to hide their children rather than bringing them to be registered with SWD.

In addition, Normah reported that awareness about learning difficulties was very low and diagnosis of the impairments was rather unusual before the 21st century. Farah also noted that only Down syndrome was specifically diagnosed and that children with other types of impairments such as

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), autism and other specific learning disabilities were usually regarded simply as 'naughty' or 'head strong' or 'cheeky'. Besides, due to the low level of consciousness, parents just accept their children whatever they are. As a result, most of them were treated similar to other children without any extraordinary assistance given.

Referring to the low awareness among the public in previous years, it is not surprising that the number of students with learning difficulties who went to the public school was described by Nisah as very discouraging. Furthermore, she pointed out that the special education for children with learning difficulties was also formally started in 1997 and opportunities for equal access to formal education structures were also described as very restricted.

Adding to this, Harun argued that children and young people mostly stayed at home without proper education. He reported that the number of students with learning difficulties who continue to secondary school or vocational training decreased dramatically to 5000 students from over 17,000 students in primary school in 2005. This problem of dropping out was believed to have an impact on the transition to the mainstream community at the later stage. As a result, with a very low education, the transition to the open labour market became a serious problem faced by most persons with learning difficulties.

Referring to recent policy changes, all respondents shared the view that in the last few years, more significant changes and positive development could be seen. Awareness on disability issues has progressed encouragingly not

only among persons with disabilities themselves, but also the parents, the community and the government. Even in the central government departments, improvement could be seen in incorporating disability elements in many activities and policies as highlighted by Keigo:

“...in Malaysia’s history, there is a big shift in 2007- after Persons with Disabilities Act 2008 (PWDA 2008), more progress could be seen. Draft of PWDA 2008 has been started since 2002, and JICA project started in 2005. And the current issues of disability are to change disability issues from rehabilitation to inclusion or right issues. In 2005, JICA involved enhancing the shift, and government has known about the issue...and at the same time, United Nation (UN) also interested in disability issues” (Keigo)

Normah similarly illustrated the changes:

“The persons with disabilities started to come forward fighting for their rights. With this pressure, the community began to realise and become sensitive to disability issues. One after another development evolved - the policy, the act, the council.” (Normah)

On top of that, Normah believed that the upgrade of Disabled People Unit to DPwDD, which was approved by the Malaysia Public Service Department, can be regarded as evidence that the government has taken a serious measure to cater for disability issues.

Moreover, Normah asserted that the term ‘mental health’ was changed to ‘learning difficulties’ which facilitated and accelerated public acceptance and, therefore, increased the number of registration with DPwDD. The improvement of the social services, policies and application in intensifying the well-being of persons with disabilities was also believed to boost the chance of independent living.

Besides, participation by persons with disabilities has been fostered by government agencies as a whole. Normah commented that it is now regarded as a normal practice to see the involvement of persons with disabilities in any governmental activities. Alongside this progress, came the understanding of the rights to enjoy equal opportunities which was witnessed by an increase of awareness among all groups of disabled people which was then followed by more awareness on the part of persons with learning difficulties.

It is argued that the development of self-advocacy among people with learning difficulties has increased this awareness. Moreover, support from international organisations such as JICA which will be discussed in detail in 8.3.3 seemed to be encouraging the development of more rights-based services. Likewise, the United Nations (UN) is also said to be interested in conducting research to support disability issues. However, more importantly, Normah affirmed that the seriousness and sincerity of the Honorable Senator Dato' Sri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, the Minister of Women, Family and Community Development (MoWFCD) in relation to disability issues, has brought about the development of services for them and has been instrumental in raising awareness among the whole population.

From the examples they gave, it is apparent that respondents believed that progress had been made and that there had been changes in the approach of services in every department. This had brought about more positive

action, which supported the economic participation of persons with disabilities.

8.2.2 Understanding the capacity of persons with learning difficulties to work in supported employment

In considering persons with learning difficulties more specifically, nearly every respondent emphasized that the scepticism among stakeholders in relation to the ability of this group has resulted in a situation of segregation and exclusion in the society. Keigo and Nisah argued that misunderstandings and misconceptions about their competency to participate in the workforce have also obstructed their job transition:

“...the hardest barrier to break is the wrong impression or misperception and understandings about abilities of persons with learning difficulties by the general public... their potentials are not taken by both government and private sectors...” (Keigo)

“Most employers underestimate the capacity of persons with learning difficulties. In fact, they can do the work... only that they need more time to learn something new...” (Nisah)

“...we have to look at their capacity. We have to suit them with the job...not to suit the job with them” (Farah)

Zakaria added that persons with learning difficulties were not treated as human resources among many employers. He claimed that even NGOs tended to see persons with learning difficulties as only having the potential to work within sheltered workshops rather than having the opportunity to prove their abilities within mainstream employment.

When asked about their own perspectives on the abilities of persons with learning difficulties as a group to join the labour market, however, it is

apparent that only Keigo has a strong faith in their abilities. Other respondents seemed to hesitate to confirm their capacity to work in supported employment. Yusoff, for instance, admitted his doubt about persons with learning difficulties since the special education teachers themselves denied the capacity of this group. He suggested that this may result in indirect discrimination against them:

*“...nobody confident... so, indirectly we are discriminating them...”
(Yusoff)*

Nisah put forward the view that the capacity of persons with learning difficulties should be seen as based on their level of impairments. Those who are less capable and are not able to join special education programmes at school are believed only to be suitable to work in sheltered workshops. However, she suggested that those who join the special education programme are fit to work in supported employment provided that they have the right support.

The stigma of limitation and incompetence has somehow created a negative preconception towards persons with learning difficulties. Declaring their impairment to the public was said to close the door to them entering the labour market. Harun highlighted this dilemma among persons with learning difficulties:

*“There is a case where the students face difficulty in hunting for a job because his certificate stated that he was from special-education class. Therefore, they have to avoid using their certificates and disclosing their disability to ease the job search”
(Harun)*

“In fact; these people have their own strength. They are hardworking, cautious. The difficulty is to get a contract” (Yusoff)

8.3 SUPPORTING PERSONS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES INTO EMPLOYMENT

In general, all the government officials taking part in the interviews testified to the improvement in the ministerial services offered for persons with disabilities. The transition from the welfare basis to the rights basis was reported to be apparently seen as a way in which more awareness and commitments to recognise the rights of persons with disabilities could be identified in the current government’s initiative. Yet, persons with learning difficulties particularly were portrayed as seriously neglected compared to other groups of disabled people.

All respondents shared their experiences of what they regarded as significant changes in their agencies around the welfare, education and employment services provided for persons with disabilities in the country. It should be noted, however, that since the selected respondents are the policy makers and practitioners, a discussion of this nature on policy-related issues to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities might be expected.

Three areas of support will be discussed in the following sections involving the education and training, employment services and SWD-JICA project. The respondents assumed that the opportunities for this group to join the open market could be enhanced with the skills and qualifications as well as a good career path and career services. Moreover, it is argued that the support from

JICA in the joint SWD-JICA project has given full support for this group to enter supported employment.

8.3.1 Education and training

In supporting persons with learning difficulties into employment, some argued that the special education programme has offered some improvements. Harun from the Unit of Programme Transition and Vocational Management under SED declared that the special education curriculum have been improved with the meaningful vocational and transition programmes. The vocational curriculum which is standardised by the Skills Development Department using the typical Malaysian Skill Certificate was recently added in the special education vocational curriculum. In addition, the Unit is currently conducting research on the curriculum aspects so as to ensure the relevance of the course or syllabus to the present day.

With regards to the transition programme, Harun said that a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) have been signed with several employers and agencies to accommodate students with learning difficulties in vocational skills training and job training. With this experience, it is believed that they will be exposed to work-life experience and will also be given a certificate to verify their ability to work. He highlighted an example of MoU with Giat MARA, one of the significant agencies in providing vocational skills:

“...this 6-months-programme with Giat MARA is offered for persons with learning difficulties in Special Education curriculum to learn vocational skill with trained and qualified teachers. Those participate in this programme will be given RM200 allowance per month. It is based on the Open Entry Open Exit (2OE) strategy which means that the students are free to enter and exit Giat

MARA without specific time. It is also based on 3 days at Giat MARA and 2 days at school. After completing the training, they will be given Giat MARA certificate.”(Harun)

8.3.2 Employment services

In sharing the initial commitment to the call for economic participation among persons with disabilities in the private sector, Zakaria revealed that the starting point of this awareness has been initiated in 1990 by Tun Hasmah Ali, the wife of the former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Mahathir Mohamad. This call extended the policy of a one per cent quota for persons with disabilities to work in the public sector as mentioned in Chapter 2. Stressing this, Yusoff referred to the fact that the campaign was directed towards all categories of disabilities together, without focusing on any particular group. Promotional activities were conducted by government to support persons with disabilities to join the labour market and employers were encouraged to open job opportunities for them. Nevertheless, the response to the promotion was reported to be mostly from people with physical and hearing impairments. Zakaria emphasised that no job applications were registered from persons with learning difficulties:

“We offer all categories to register but only the physical and deaf come. And, the involvement from NGOs is also from these categories”

Yusoff admitted that the department did not take seriously its responsibility to encourage employers to hire persons with disabilities. During this period, the role of the LD was focused more on law enforcement in resolving complaints, handling labour cases and doing periodic inspections on employees' rights. Therefore, persuading employers to open job opportunities for persons with

disabilities was assumed as in conflict with the role of enforcement played by the department. This situation was represented by Yusoff as being a barrier to the participation of persons with learning difficulties in the labour market:

“At that time, our (department) priority is for enforcement. We still need to monitor the employer to comply with our [Employment] Acts to preserve employees’ rights...the employer has seen us as the so-called ‘enemy’ as we were defending on workers’ rights, though we also give advice for them. So, when we are directed to promote the participation of persons with disabilities in the labour market, it is quite difficult for us to ask the employer to employ persons with disabilities. You just imagine, today; I go to the employer and enforce the law. Tomorrow, I have to go to their premises to ask them to employ persons with disabilities. It is so contradicted!” (Yusoff)

Referring to the significant changes in current services, Yusoff reported that, from time to time, the services had been extended to promote job registration among persons with disabilities. Likewise, support for economic participation also was reported to have been taken seriously as evidenced by measures such as establishing the Disabled Workers Unit in the LD. He mentioned about the LD offering online registration and job matching processes as well as seminars and awareness to promote the economic participation as described in Chapter Two. Normah added that the government also has allocated a Disabled Worker Allowance of RM300 per month on top of the monthly salary for those receiving below RM1200. This incentive is considered as encouraging since the amount is more than the basic RM150 Disabled Allowance per month which is the entitlement of all persons with disabilities.

Referring to the one per cent quota policy of employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in the government sector which was then extended

to the private sector, Yusoff considered the quota as a general employment policy in promoting the participation of persons with disabilities. While focusing the discussion to employment opportunities of the group in the private sector, Zakaria did not see extending the policy to the private sector is sensible since the autonomy should be given to the company:

“If we have such policy on recruiting persons with disabilities in the private sector, the situation will be more havoc. It is their territory. We cannot interfere in that.” (Zakaria)

For him, policy is not a sustainable or effective control issue anymore. The most important thing is to find effective ways of enhancing the awareness of the social responsibilities towards persons with disabilities.

8.3.3 SWD-JICA project

In general, the support from JICA is acknowledged by all respondents to have brought about substantial changes in addressing disability issues in Malaysia with the joint SWD-JICA project namely Social Participatory Inclusion in the Community and Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities in Malaysia. In reviewing this project, it is sensible to note that since Keigo is the organiser of the project, the main contribution to the discussion was mainly by him. Illustrating the project as a new approach introduced in human resource services for persons with disabilities, he clarified that the support was given with the aim to enhancing the understanding of Malaysian government in providing better services for persons with disabilities:

The progress is awareness among public. Conceptual discussion made but people do not know how to put it on practice. So, JICA

try to put it into practice by implementing independent living, self-advocacy and job coaching". (Keigo)

Mitsui additionally stressed the commitment of JICA in trying to energise the scheme into full implementation since the baseline survey of the project had to be reported to the Japanese government.

Referring to this project, Keigo stated that employment is in fact not the main focus of the project. He emphasised that JICA's intention in Phase 1 of the project (2005-2008) was primarily to shift from individual model to social model of disability. Recognizing that employment is one of the most interesting issues in relation to disability for SWD and JICA, this project started by focusing on shifting the focus of services of the SWD and related agencies from recovery and rehabilitation to supportive participation oriented provision.

While there are many approaches in relation to employment , Keigo highlighted and drew attention to the fact that that this project was not focusing on vocational rehabilitation nor sheltered employment as these are seen to be based on the individual model of disability. Accordingly, supported employment is one of the concrete approaches applying the social model of disability. Therefore, supported employment with job coaching approach was selected in order to contribute to attaining this aspiration.

However, at the end of the project, the amounts of services were reported to be far less than expected. Therefore, the project was continued to the second phase (2010-2012) with a well-defined focus. Supported employment

was to be introduced as a government programme with two main pillars; the development of supported employment in government systems and the development of resources i.e. human resources, training packages and modules to supported employment.

On the whole, he said, this has been endorsed as a significant project through which the government enhances the participation of persons with disabilities in the community. Translating concepts into practice and introducing concrete activities has resulted in a substantial impact on the development of supported employment. He suggested that with a strong monitoring from JICA, the outsider, the government will become more aware of their role to support the inclusion and more serious policies will be structured to achieve this goal.

Referring to the significant influence of this project, Farah highlighted the Human Resources Development Fund (HRDF) initiatives to give incentives to the job coaches who assist any persons with disabilities participating in meaningful employment as discussed in Chapter 2. This incentive directly supports the implementation of supported employment.

In short, it is apparent that the enhancements in the government support in education and training system as well as employment services have created more awareness to include persons with learning difficulties in the labour workforce. Moreover, with the support from the SWD-JICA project, supported employment for this group of persons with learning difficulties was finally formed.

8.4 REVIEWS ON SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

Supported employment is generally considered as a new term for most respondents in the context of measures to support the participation of persons with disabilities in the mainstream employment. Nevertheless, the idea of people with learning difficulties working in mainstream employment is not new according to those who took part in the interviews. Nisah and Normah both highlighted examples of a few persons with learning difficulties who are working in open employment in various sectors though in jobs requiring only basic skills:

“I do not know why people started to speak about it [supported employment] now. If we see the X [name of organisation] president, he has work in a private sector for almost 10 years. But we never care about it. Same to job coach. May be there are such activities before, but only now we labelled it” (Normah)

Reflecting on this, Keigo pondered about the existence of supported employment in the country:

“Maybe Malaysia has known about supported employment before without really knowing the term of ‘supported employment’ or ‘job coaching’. However, in terms of implementation, only until 2005, we could hear the seriousness of supported employment approach for persons with disabilities” (Keigo)

Parallel to this, Yusoff declared that supported employment was actually introduced in the International Labour Organisation (ILO) workshop for LD officers in 1997. Nonetheless no specific or further action was taken before the present scheme. This was thought by Yusoff to be due to the theoretical method of training given to the officers and an absence of any hands-on

experience with the supported employment approach. As a result, there was no continuation of the method afterwards and it was disregarded:

“They only cater on theories in the class. We cannot really see how it should be implemented. Therefore, it just stay there...on paper.” (Yusoff)

It is largely acknowledged that the SWD-JICA project has opened the room for improvement in terms of encouraging persons with learning difficulties to join open employment. Normah emphasized strongly the direct support and influence of this project in relation to the emergence of supported employment in Malaysia. In support of this view, Farah claimed that the term ‘supported employment’ or ‘job coaching’ has started to be prominent and well known as a result of this project. Yusoff who has similar thoughts praised the part played by the initiative in offering more participation among persons with learning difficulties.

Nonetheless, while the SWD-JICA project is said to have had significant influence on supported employment, there are also other interrelated factors which have influenced the development of the scheme in the country. These influences will be discussed in the following section.

8.4.1 Factors influencing the emergence of supported employment

Prior to discussing the practices of supported employment in Malaysia, respondents were asked about their perceptions of the factors which instigated the development of this new scheme. Drawing on the historical background and the current circumstances of dealing with disability issues, two main themes of progress and stability in the economy and the political

and social system; and pressure for change that has been brought to bear emerged as the influencing factors to the emergence of supported employment in Malaysia.

Referring to the development and changes in the government policies and strategies, Zakaria acknowledged that Malaysia is now regarded as a developing country with a stable political, economic and social system. He further explained that previously, little attention was given to the development of persons with disabilities since Malaysia was struggling to increase its economic prospects. Moreover, in political terms the government policies have been more concerned on integrating different ethnic groups within a multi-ethnic society. Nonetheless, believing that *“development moves with time”*, Zakaria illustrated that little-by-little with increased stability; the doors were opened more widely to accommodate the issue of disability. The policies on enhancing and sustaining the development of persons with disabilities were expanded and more budgets were allocated for the wellbeing of this group.

Keigo, on the other hand, pointed to the influence of the national and international pressure to bring about the development of supported employment:

“Domestically, persons with disabilities movements fought for their rights and internationally conventions of ILO and UN Malaysia followed. And we can say that, JICA contributed from outside”
(Keigo).

In terms of national forces, it is apparent that NGOs have initiated the struggle to fight for the rights of persons with disabilities with the increase of

awareness among them. The improvement of policies and regulations related to disability issues as mentioned in the previous section could be regarded as the consequences of the increasing strength and influence of the NGOs. Besides, with the development of self-advocacy among persons with learning difficulties, Keigo stated that this group of people have clearer views on their rights and have started to fight for equal treatment and participation in the community. Hence, since employment is regarded as one of the basic necessities to improve wellbeing, they struggled for their place in open employment.

In addition, the international proposal to shift from medical model to social model which guided the SWD-JICA project was believed to be the continuation of NGOs' engagement on the issues of social exclusion in Malaysia:

"People who start to say- about the shift of individual model to social model are in our project. But before that, disabled organisations have fought for their rights on issues of social exclusion and the understanding or discussion were going on from quite long time ago. Even, the accessibility demonstration-LRT - happened in 1995, so, it's a long time ago" (Keigo)

Simultaneously, Yusoff, Zakaria and Normah emphasized that being a signatory to the Biwako Millennium Framework (BMF) and United Nations (UN) conventions also forced the government to move forward and offer more opportunities to be enjoyed by persons with disabilities.

8.4.2 Impact of supported employment

Providing job opportunities for people with learning disabilities is agreed by all respondents to be a good and beneficial approach as working is one of the important forms of social participation. Relating to this social inclusion, all respondents gave positive views about the impact of supported employment on the personal development and confidence. Moreover, the increase of salary compared to the benefits given in sheltered workshops is believed to help people to live independently and to assimilate with other community.

Integrating persons with learning difficulties in supported employment has not been seen as a negative factor as far as reducing the employment opportunities among persons without disabilities. It would just generate more job opportunities among persons with disabilities. Keigo for instance claimed that, *“it is not a zero-sum game”* but opening more job prospects to the persons with disabilities. Moreover, Zakaria commented that the current opportunities given to the group were mainly for the low skill jobs which were usually not seen as attractive by the general public. Therefore, supported employment is contributing indirectly to solving the problem of labour shortage in most low skill jobs.

Along with helping this group into secure jobs, Yusoff and Zakaria believed that supported employment will also have what they viewed as a positive impact in reducing the dependency on foreign workers. On top of that, employers will have more choice of human resources and the scheme will create a positive challenge for non-disabled people:

“This will also give positive impact as the employers will have more choices of prospective employees. Disability will be no longer an excuse since once they are trained, the employer will get better candidates. In fact, by employing persons with disabilities, and persons with learning difficulties specifically, it will also challenge the non-disabled to strive and work better. Furthermore, it could also be regarded as a complementary to reduce the intake of foreign workers and provide more opportunities for latent workforce. Moreover, it will also assist in providing more options to employers not to take the foreign workforce on the basis of corporate social responsibilities” (Zakaria)

The findings indicate that those interviewed believe that supported employment has had a positive impact not only for the persons with learning difficulties themselves but also on some important features of the current employment market.

8.5 CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

When asked about the implementation of the scheme, most respondents have no ideas to share since most of them- other than Keigo, Normah and Farah, who are monitoring the SWD-JICA project- are not directly involved with the scheme. As a result, the discussions about the challenges faced in the development implementation of supported employment tended to be quite broadly-based. From their point of view, six main issues were raised around the governmental policies, definitions of persons with learning difficulties, education and training, employment opportunities, human resources and parental support.

8.5.1 Lack of governmental policies and support relating to integrate persons with learning difficulties into the open employment

Asked about the government policies on disability, Keigo criticised the absence of employment policies for persons with disabilities:

“There is no policy yet, only a guideline. Just a guideline... no specific policy of employment among persons with disabilities.”(Keigo)

On the other hand, Mitsui commented on the Persons with Disabilities Act 2008 (PWDA 2008):

“..even though there is a law, but there is no coordination, so for the user part [user point of view], it is not accessible” (Mitsui)

In contrast, Zakaria expressed his view that the real problem is actually in transforming the policies involving persons with disabilities into realities:

“...we have the policy...but how far has it been followed up and followed through. When the time comes, then we busy with it. Then, when it is finished, it is just gone” (Zakaria)

He also admitted that the root of the failure in dealing with disability issues is actually within the government. He then illustrated the common problem confronted in any department:

“...we don't take the opportunity to fulfil the respective roles rather than pointing out the issues to other department or ministries declaring not under their jurisdiction or responsibilities. We are not truly giving our heart to fight for them. We never think about the issue specifically, just in the general terms” (Zakaria)

From this illustration, Zakaria also argued that the lack of legal structures and social services contributed to this low participation. There was also a major concern expressed by all administrators about the need to have collaboration

and involvement from all relevant parties within the local community. Yusoff, for instance noted:

"..If we look at the situation now, people started paying attention on persons with learning difficulties. People are already aware, there is positive progress on the special education, and it is a good time to have a good connection with the Special Education Division, Welfare Department and NGOs to help persons with disabilities. Maybe we can bring employers who want to outsource their work to school, to give them exposure on the conditions of persons with learning difficulties at school... I think Labour [Department] may play the role. We have to look at their strength."(Yusoff)

Having a similar view, Normah suggested:

"At the same time, the main agencies related to disability, especially those dealing with welfare, health, education and employment should collaborate. Each of us has our own responsibilities. If we have such integration between ministries, I don't think we will face any problem." (Normah)

8.5.2 Broad definition of persons with learning difficulties

Normah and Farah shared their difficulties in creating the right responses and arrangements for persons with learning difficulties because the broad definition of persons with learning difficulties covers any disabilities related to intellectual and behavioral limitations. Normah reported that:

"The problem in Malaysia is that, we put all categories of learning difficulties such as autism, down's syndrome, dyslexia, or ADHD under one category of learning difficulties. We don't consider distinguishing them based on their disability." (Normah)

Farah then added:

"...so, if you asked how many down's syndrome person we have in Malaysia, we can't give the figure" (Farah)

It was suggested by both Normah and Farah that not specifying the specific impairments or conditions among persons with learning difficulties has generated a generalized conception of this group. For Normah,

“This people, they are very different in each category, even in one category, they have different level of disability. So, people cannot generalise their disability to be the same” (Normah)

Nisah also commented that the ‘general label’ given to this group made it complicated for teachers in monitoring the progress of each child. She suggested identification of the diagnosed impairment or condition for each individual should be revealed on the disabled card:

“If teachers know the specific disabilities the child is having, it will be easier for the teacher to approach the child” (Nisah)

However, Normah stated that the department is now struggling to create a new term on the registration card for persons with learning difficulties. They will try to put the specific impairments or conditions such as autism or dyslexia on the card for easy reference on their limitations and abilities. By doing this, Normah hopes that it will be possible to better estimate the prevalence of this group in order to plan suitable provisions for them.

Besides, though the general term of ‘learning difficulties’ is used in DPwDD and most agencies, Harun highlighted the discrepancy of using the term of ‘learning difficulties’ and ‘learning disabilities’ in the SED which implies the inconsistencies in the terminology of ‘learning difficulties’ between agencies:

“Students with learning difficulties are those who are having difficulty in understanding the subjects taught by teachers in class and are placed in a special rehabilitation class...while students with learning disabilities are regarded as having disability and only can be taught through special education.”(Harun)

8.5.3 Insufficient special education and transition programme

Despite the fact that special education was claimed by Nisah and Harun to have undergone considerable positive changes, Nisah emphasised the readiness among students with learning difficulties to rely for their transition from school to work on the schools they attend and where they get an education. This situation happens due to the special education curriculum concentrating more on behaviour modification rather than proper education or employability skills. Its quality depends on the creativity and commitment of teachers. Besides, he said that schools were given autonomy to construct their own activities based on the flexible general curriculum guidelines. This indicates that until now, there is no standard curriculum on preparing them for the world of work. This is stressed by Zakaria:

“...the curriculum syllabus in the special education are still related to the basic kinds of job... hairdressing, sewing... but these are all for self-employed. The employability skill is less... the syllabus is more towards to be entrepreneur or leading to independent lives... but how could they control a business if they can't even be taking care of themselves? (Zakaria)

In addition, Nisah expressed her dissatisfaction with the quality of teachers in providing adequate education for students with learning difficulties. Most teachers were portrayed as less interested and creative in teaching skills relevant to current needs. She went on to say that while the curriculum has improved with the Individual Education Plan (IEP) that focuses on individual abilities, the development of students will not appear without the personal commitment of the teachers. Therefore, a standard curriculum with clear guidelines would be helpful to solve this problem, since Nisah believed that

the right guidance and support for persons with learning difficulties will result in better performance. Normah also noted:

“Though we have special education ...it is still not reliable...it should be improved” (Normah)

Normah believed that education is the basic necessity for any individual before joining the community. That is why, the DPwDD is offering an alternative to support those rejected from attending public schools, the opportunity to attend the Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) in each community as described in Chapter 2. This is to make sure they could learn basic education with a standard curriculum. The main aim, however, is not to introduce them to work but is more about independent living. Normah noted that: *“At least they can read and write”*.

Keigo’s view was that they need to be trained to deal with real life:

“.. even though academic aspect should be a main part similar to mainstream education, more practical and needs-based approach and contents, such as transition approach to meet more daily skills and life related training should be an option to be given to persons with disabilities, based on their needs”(Keigo)

Farah voiced her concern that regardless of the opportunities given to them to join training or vocational skills, that the child attending a special education class has an uncertain future since they are usually deposited in a classroom regardless of their level of impairment. As a result, the children are required to follow only very basic syllabus. Moreover, Farah mentioned that their low qualifications have somehow precluded many from joining training institutions. As a result, most of them just stay at home after graduating from school.

Zakaria alternatively suggested that these education and training limitations should be taken into consideration by having a 3-year transition period for this group. This transition which allows training after school or on-job-training should be implemented with the collaboration of all related agencies. In addition, special incentives should be given to the employers for supporting the programme.

Despite the need for more room for improvement in the special education curriculum, Normah stressed that persons with disabilities themselves also need to change:

“...they also have to adjust...they always said they don't want to be sympathised, they fight for their rights, if we don't give, they will say it is discrimination...but what they have done to make them equipped to the job?..” (Normah)

8.5.4 Limited employment opportunities for persons with learning difficulties

In discussing the limited employment opportunities available for persons with learning difficulties, Harun and Nisah from SED discussed the qualifications of the individuals in relation to the requirements of employers. They highlighted that since many of them did not go through the standard examination, most did not achieve the minimum requirement to work in the public sector which is to have at least a certificate of lower secondary assessment or *Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR)*. This therefore restricted the opportunities for persons with learning difficulties to participate in the labour market even in low-skilled jobs. Nisah regarded this as indirect discrimination:

“We recommend to give more opportunities but at the same time we have certain restrictions” (Nisah)

Believing in their ability to participate in the workforce, Nisah suggested that the minimum requirements should be revised for persons with learning difficulties to open up more job opportunities:

“...a policy should be changed by imposing people’s opinion as every single person in the community should play their role in encouraging the employment opportunities for them [persons with learning difficulties] - policy makers, employers, parents, educationists.” (Nisah)

Zakaria also stressed the importance of having a database of persons with disabilities which accumulate all data from related departments or ministries to ease the tracking and monitoring of suitable candidates. Lists with complete details of their abilities and limitations could help the matching process for both candidates and employers.

8.5.5 Shortage of human resources

The full implementation of what is seen to be an important policy has been made impossible by an extreme shortage of human resources. Referring to the restructuring of the Disabled People Unit to DPwDD as described in Chapter 2; Normah expressed her frustration that DPwDD is not an independent department and is still under the management of the Social Welfare Department. DPwDD is described as only operating centrally at the headquarters, while officers who act as the driving forces are still located in the Social Welfare branch offices. They are burdened with a range of responsibilities in addition to those for persons with disabilities, for example,

dealing with children, older people and other welfare issues as Normah stated:

“Although we have separate department, but in the ground level, we have competing demands...an officer will still have particular responsibilities.”(Normah)

It is clear that services related to persons with disabilities will be sometimes given lower priorities compared to other responsibilities. Therefore, Nisah felt that having a department specialising for persons with disabilities at the ministry level would not resolve the problem. On this issue, Farah discussed the reliability of the officers to focus on the job coaching scheme introduced by DPwDD due to other competing responsibilities and tasks. For both of them, a job coach needs to concentrate and focus on the case otherwise it will not work:

“...if we see the Japanese job coaching, they are really committed with their work. Same goes to NGO. That is why they can succeed. But, for us, we cannot focus since we have many other tasks other than job coaching to be completed. Today, we have to do this... tomorrow...another one. So, when could we finish the job coach work?” (Normah)

Also considering these hurdles, Yusoff admitted that the priority of LD was given to other issues especially related to foreign workers involving the entry application and approval process. Due to priority being given politically and economically to this ‘*more important*’ issue of foreign workers, the officers were required to arrange their work based on this need. As a result, the disability issues go to the bottom of the list. However, he said that he was assured of the possibility of giving full commitment in future as other agencies would be topping up the strength of the department. He also

expressed his gratitude to JICA and NGOs for giving full commitment to struggling for the benefit of persons with disabilities. Since the government capacity of human resources is very limited, he admitted that the implementation of supported employment has been very strong with the help of NGOs.

Despite of the fact that the government was having a shortage of human resources, Normah believed in the need to overcome the problem and denied the need to wait for more officers. She suggested that each branch should have at least one job coach with 90 per cent of their workload focused on supported employment. She really hoped that by appointing at least 13 job coaches nationwide as a start, more supported employment would be created for persons with learning difficulties.

8.5.6 Restricted autonomy from the parents and carers

Half of the respondents stressed the significance of the role of parents in motivating their sons and daughters to participate inclusively in community activities. Nisah and Normah testified that parents usually discouraged their children to join inclusive education or the labour market. They sometimes become overprotective and do not allow their sons and daughters to pursue better vocational education or get a better job. Therefore, Normah recommends more opportunities should be given to persons with disabilities:

“Parents should be ‘open-minded’. They should bring their child further” (Normah)

Similarly, Yusoff reiterated his opinion on the refusal of parents to expose their sons and daughters to participation in mainstream employment.

Additionally, he suggested that persons with disabilities are not desperate to work because they are still living with their families and supported by them:

“At this moment, their livelihoods are secured by family or extended family. However, it may be more difficult in the near future, as other developed countries face a similar situation. Malaysia should have a social structure to secure their living and livelihoods.” (Keigo)

On the other hand, Keigo believed that the notion of the social model of disability, focusing more on society as agents of change, must be applied to integrate this group into the community:

“...the target should be focused on the society- both employers and general public who acts as a target and agents to change, not merely on the disabled person to change or meet socially constructed requirements..” (Keigo)

Above all, it can be concluded that having a clear understanding on the limitations of persons with learning difficulties will help in planning suitable activities for them. Moreover, policies and guidelines in both education and employment should be looked through and improved. It is strongly believed that with the support from the family and collaborations of related ministries, better provision and services should be created and accomplished.

8.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented the findings from the interviews with government officials and examined their understanding of disability issues generally and persons with learning difficulties in particular. The development of provision

for persons with disabilities is outlined and the current situation is discussed by the respondents linked to their context of work. It is apparent that in response to the employability of persons with learning difficulties, more than half of respondents expressed their doubts on the ability of persons with learning difficulties to work.

The chapter also overviews the services provided in supporting the economic participation of persons with learning difficulties concentrating on three areas of support: education and training, employment services and SWD-JICA project. The improvement in the education system was acknowledged with the introduction of a vocational curriculum at school and the development of a transition programme for the students. Besides, the support for employment services was shown to focus less on persons with learning difficulties compared to other categories of impairments. Only after the widespread application of the job coaching system through the SWD-JICA project was attention given to this group of persons with learning difficulties.

Referring to the emergence of supported employment in Malaysia, two significant factors were discussed: the economic, political and social stability as well as the national and international pressure. It is believed that since Malaysia has achieved a certain level of economic growth and political stability, priorities shift to allow for a focus on the social system such as the area of disability. Moreover, the enthusiasm of NGOs in fighting for the rights of persons with disabilities and the commitment from international organisations such as JICA in acting to empower the rights of persons with

disabilities was also viewed as stimulating the development of supported employment.

In general, supported employment was agreed to have a positive impact on the lives of persons with learning difficulties who join the scheme. Moreover, it was also described as facilitating and addressing the critical situation of labour shortage in most low skills job which compel most employers to depend on foreign workers. In addition, it will indirectly create a challenging labour market since the employers will have more choice of human resources. Nevertheless, since this scheme of supported employment is still at an early stage, many challenges were described to be encountered along the development and implementation of supported employment. Thus, reflections and recommendations to improve the scheme were also outlined.

Next, the findings from the perspectives of an employer will be presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 9
**EMPLOYER'S PERSPECTIVES ON PERSONS WITH LEARNING
DIFFICULTIES AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT**

9.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reports on and discusses the findings relating to the employer's knowledge and managers' perceptions of the characteristics of persons with learning difficulties who were part of the supported employment scheme and their ability to participate in supported employment. These findings are based upon the information collected through semi-structured interviews with managers from BZ Corporation. As mentioned in Chapter 5 BZ Corporation was selected as they are the first Malaysian retailer to introduce a supported employment scheme for persons with disabilities, most of whom are persons with learning difficulties.

Four male and three female managers were individually interviewed representing the head office and three different outlets. Apart from two managers from the training unit, the other five managers were selected from different outlets on the grounds that they had direct engagement with employees with learning difficulties (Table 9.1). Their working experiences are varied in length: between two to fifteen years. All seven interviews which were conducted in either Malay or English, were transcribed in the language spoken but were coded in English. The names are pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

Table 9.1 Details of Respondents (Managers)

Code	Pseudonym	Age	Department/Units	Place of work
EMP 1	Naran	39	Human Resource and Training Unit	Head Office
EMP 2	Hamid	45	Training Unit	Head Office
EMP 3	Marina	35	General Merchandise	Hypermarket
EMP 4	Kumari	35	Sales	Hypermarket
EMP 5	Eng	42	Management	Hypermarket
EMP 6	Hasnita	32	Human Resource	Hypermarket
EMP 7	Kamarul	37	Human Resource	Hypermarket

The purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to examine the managers' opinions about the capacity of persons with learning difficulties to work in open employment and to discover their experiences in the implementation of supported employment in their company. Following analysis of the answers from all interview questions, the responses were categorized into four key sections: perceptions on the ability of persons with learning difficulties, opinions on the development and implementation of supported employment in the company, the impact of supported employment and challenges and recommendations in supporting employment opportunities for persons with learning difficulties.

9.2 KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF PERSONS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

It has been suggested that persons with learning difficulties are generally seen as un-reliable candidates for employment by most employers in Malaysia (Jayasooria *et al.*, 1997). Data from the interviews with these managers with regards to their perceptions about the ability of persons with learning difficulties to join the open market, however, challenged this view to some extent at least. Since the managers' experiences with persons with

learning difficulties were related to workplace issues, their perceptions and understanding of this group focused on their employability and competencies to join the labour market.

Data from the interviews show that most managers appeared to have formed their own opinions about employees with learning difficulties in terms of their abilities to fulfil the tasks given, interact with other staff and customers and also independently manage their personal activities. As might be expected, however, the capacity of the employees to understand their job roles was given extra attention, compared to other domains such as social interaction and independence skills.

9.2.1 Capacity to understand and perform the roles

Referring to the capacity of employees with learning difficulties to fulfil and perform their roles, most respondents shared the fact that they initially had doubts about the abilities of this group to enter employment. When asked about her perception when she first knew she would be getting a person with learning difficulties as her subordinate, Marina described her scepticism about the ability of the employee with learning difficulties to do the job and deal effectively with customers:

"I am thinking whether they can do the job or not, up to what level she could understand the command. ...quite worried if she cannot deal with the customer...and there will be a chaos...but after she started the job, I now believe she can do the job."(Marina)

However, after assigning them their job roles, most said that they observed a similar level of productivity between employees with and without disabilities.

The majority believed that with help and support, this group of employees could fully understand their job responsibilities and could be left to accomplish the tasks independently. Marina shared her doubt about her subordinate's ability to fulfil the tasks given. However, after letting her complete the tasks, she knew that this employee with learning difficulties was capable of doing the work provided that she had assistance and support:

"...I feel less confident at the beginning, but after a week, I can see that she could do the work as other workers. It is just... we have to assist and support her."(Marina)

Having similar thoughts, Hasnita believed that employees with learning difficulties can perform their job but need more time to fulfil the tasks:

"They can do the job, only that they are quite slow" (Hasnita)

Despite their recognition of the capacity of the employees with learning difficulties to do the work, all respondents admitted that they had not found it easy to train persons with learning difficulties to understand their roles.

Employees with learning difficulties were described as not always understanding instructions and taking longer to learn the job responsibilities.

Referring to the period during the training week when employees with learning difficulties were introduced to their job responsibilities, Hamid said that he regarded the training he conducted with this group of employees as the most difficult experience he had had in his working life. Their difficulties in understanding and their short-term memory span, he said, meant that he had to repeat the same thing several times. As he has no experience in

conducting training with a group of persons with learning difficulties, he felt that it was difficult to do it in the right way.

Adding to this, Kamarul also stated that the employees with learning difficulties occasionally have to be reminded of basic daily tasks. Marina, noted similar experiences:

“Sometimes, she was lost and does not know what to do. She came to me and asked what she was supposed to do. And, I have to explain the tasks repeatedly” (Marina).

Recognising that they learned more slowly, Kumari tried to give time and space for them to adapt to certain tasks before proceeding to let them independently to manage the work:

“They are slow in learning... we understand their limitation. So, we give them training first. Give them time to learn... when we see that they can manage the job, we let them to do it independently. It took at least one month because he is based at customer service...in customer service, the job is quite challenging since they have to do their work, and at the same time they have to look after the customer... that is why I told him... if you need more time, then take your time.”(Kumari)

She believed, however, that it is quite straightforward to teach employees with learning difficulties since she found that they would directly follow the instructions given:

“They are actually easy to teach. They really follow the instructions given and will try not to do any error. Whatever we told them, they would do it.” (Kumari)

While for Marina, dealing with the customer’s perception on her subordinate of being slow, she felt it is important to offer help whenever a problem arose:

“Sometimes customer lodged a complaint that she was very slow. I tried to explain that she is a disabled worker. Usually they will

understand. Alternatively, her co-workers will assist her if she faced any problem with the customer” (Marina)

Moreover, this group is described as easy to manage as they understand the tasks assigned since they are dealing with a basic and simple working process. This is affirmed by Eng:

“Some of them working quite normal. Sometimes, they work very well for ordinary working process...fold clothes, display. No problem.” (Eng)

Placing employees with learning difficulties at the customer service section which is regarded as having more complicated tasks was reported to raise no problematic issues. Referring to this, Marina assumed that their abilities should not be generalised since individuals have different levels of disability:

Every person with disabilities has their own level. So, to compare with other non-disabled employees is unfair. We will give her the tasks to suit with her level of ability.”(Marina)

9.2.2 Social contact and interaction skills

While in terms of social contact and interaction skills, employees with learning difficulties were basically described as quite reserved and shy in mixing with other people. Hasnita affirmed *“their way of socialising is different”*. As sales assistants or customer service assistants that have direct interaction with customers, this group of employees with learning difficulties were portrayed as having the skill to converse with customers. Referring to her subordinate at the customer service section, Kumari expressed her surprise at his confidence and his ability at dealing with the customer:

“...he has to face the customer, but he has his own initiatives... talking to the customer, if he faces any difficulties, he will look for

senior staff. And the customers, they know that they are dealing with employees with learning difficulties since he is wearing the special badge... We are quite surprised at his ability to treat the customer.” (Kumari)

9.2.3 Independent skills

The majority of respondents highlighted that their employees with learning difficulties are very independent. Eng, for instance remarked that apart from being accompanied to work by their parents, they are very self-reliant in leading their own lives:

“Most of them are independent. It may be their family come to fetch and collect them, but more than that, they can be independent. They go for break... lunch... like other people went with their colleagues. They got so regular like nothing... like normal people after few months. We also treated them as normal staff... only that we knew they were disabled” (Eng)

Marina pointed out that her subordinate with learning difficulties took a bus to go home after work:

“She comes to work by her own, and usually her father will bring her home in the evening. However, if she had to go back by bus, she would go back directly after work...she was afraid it would be dark, and she would face with any robbery or rape cases.”(Marina)

Moreover, some were also described as having the ability to take the initiative appropriately or to make decisions in relation to work routines:

“She knew her working and breaking time. We asked her preference to break whether at 12pm or 1pm. She chose 1pm. So, she will do her work until 1pm and take a break for an hour.”(Marina)

In spite of this, when they first joined the company, employees with learning difficulties are described as being highly dependent on their supervisor:

“..In the first few weeks, she will try to find me and asked my permission to go into the wash room. After that, she directly went

to the washroom as I told her not to ask my permission anymore to go to the toilet.”(Marina)

Having a similar experience, Hasnita also commented that she accompanied her employees with learning difficulties to go to the toilet during the first week. She initially supposed that they could not be left to do this independently. However, since employees with learning difficulties at her outlet are used to staying in the hostel when they were in school, Hasnita regarded them as capable of doing certain things independently.

In addition, employees with learning difficulties were also described as having a very positive work discipline. All respondents had similar views about the employees' disciplinary level being very high in terms of punctuality and attendance. Naran described this group of employees as loyal and honest and discussed their ability to follow rules and abide by regulations.

Hasnita, noted:

“In general, compared to other non-disabled workers, employees with learning difficulties are better in terms of attendance and punctuality. They even do not take medical leave” (Hasnita)

Despite this, there were a few cases of disciplinary problems reported among the group, sometimes seen as being due to peer influence. As Kamarul said:

“...but maybe there were one or two who were not good in terms of attendance and punctuality. Possibly because of influence from friends” (Kamarul)

In short, it is apparent that persons with learning difficulties were generally described as competent to work in supported employment though requiring an additional period to learn their job functions. While recognising individual limitations in terms of slowness in work, difficulties with understanding and

restricted social communication skills, the managers and supervisors gave positive feedback about their loyalty and their diligence in accomplishing their work. Their capacity to work in this form of open employment was evaluated very positively.

9.3 THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

The supported employment scheme was described by the respondents as being initiated in September 2007. The scheme was reported to be, initiated firstly by the top management with the main intention to give equal opportunities to persons with disabilities in relation to economic participation. Naran reported that the initiative was started when the Managing Director became interested in answering the call from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to open up job opportunities for persons with learning difficulties as a way of dealing with the turnover problems among sales assistants. After paying a visit to the United Voice in July 2007 and seeing the potential of this group to be employed within the company, he subsequently proposed to the Regional Director and Chief Executive of Organisation that this new initiative should be tried.

Naran explained that upon approval of the initiative, he was given the task of taking the lead on this plan to employ persons with disabilities. He said that he began by evaluating previous failures in both this company and others in employing persons with disabilities in order to develop a better approach.

This section provides comprehensive descriptions of the development and implementation of supported employment in BZ Corporation from the perspectives of managers. Since Naran and Hamid are the people in charge for the development and implementation of the supported employment scheme in the company, a substantial proportion of the contributions to the discussion are from them.

9.3.1 Supporting the initiative of supported employment

Apart from Naran and Hamid, other respondents acknowledged their uncertainty about the details of supported employment development in the company. However, most reported that they tried their best to support the company's initiative. All respondents shared the point that the initiative of employing persons with disabilities was announced to all levels of staff and basic training was provided to all human-resource managers from each outlet. This training was intended to create awareness of persons with disabilities, familiarise them with their abilities and enable them to learn the essential skills and approaches when dealing with persons with disabilities. Notification about the policy was sent out to all outlets as Eng described:

"Before they start they have emailed into each store and inform the details. Even though we're not directly at the outlet, we still know about that."(Eng)

Hasnita outlined the briefing conducted for department heads:

"Briefing for the department head was held to give descriptions of persons with disabilities and the way to handle them."(Hasnita)

By doing this, Hamid believed that managers were well-prepared to receive disabled employees.

In discussing the suitability of supported employment for persons with learning difficulties, all seven managers believed that the current scheme is the right attempt for offering them job opportunities. This approach was depicted by them as not only an opportunity to open more prospects for persons with learning difficulties to enter the economic world but also to unlock the door to join the community and get a taste of normal lives. Through this inclusion, it is believed that supported employment could increase their confidence and social skills.

Furthermore, Kumari considered the scheme initiated by the company had opened more opportunities for persons with learning difficulties:

“For me, since I have no experience at all dealing with persons with disabilities, when the programme is recognised, I think that it is a good idea as they should be given such opportunities, and nobody sees it negatively. It is positive feedback...nothing like... it cannot work...” (Kumari)

Moreover, Kumari mentioned that the scheme was also supported by all levels of employees in the company:

“Most staff accepted the scheme positively. They just said OK...no negative expression. Maybe for the first time, they might be surprised because nobody believes persons with learning difficulties could work. However, after having persons with disabilities in the outlet, they considered employees with learning difficulties as other non-disabled workers already because they could do the job” (Kumari)

She then added her trust of the company's positive intention to integrate this group in the open community:

"I believed the company want to give them a chance to be like a normal person... to earn their own pocket money... to learn more... instead of just stay at home and receive the public funds...by doing so, they can develop themselves." (Kumari)

Furthermore, referring to the suitability of repetitive work, for people with learning difficulties, Eng was of the view that the retail sector is the best sector for this group:

"I think retail is good for persons with learning difficulties in terms of job description....For them in the retail sector... the repetitive jobs are quite suitable for them. If you have changes, it will be more difficult" (Eng)

Talking about this company's initiatives, Marina further stated her pleasure to have such a scheme for the company:

"...I feel so proud that I am working in the company which trying to give such opportunities to this group." (Marina)

9.3.2 Plan and strategies of the supported employment scheme

Various strategies for implementing supported employment were discussed and these could be categorised under four main headings: starting small, single control of the scheme, fair policy in the recruitment and placement process and providing assistive policies for employees with learning difficulties.

Starting small

Naran reported that the supported employment scheme was introduced in the company at a very micro level with the main aim to expose persons with learning difficulties to the open employment market. He testified that the first recruitment was begun with 60 to 70 people interviewed, out of which only 12

were selected. The decision to select only 12 employees for the initial efforts was declared as part of their strategy to start small due to their inexperience of dealing with persons with disabilities, especially persons with learning difficulties. Therefore, starting small was planned to make sure their first attempt would succeed:

“I was shaking because I never handle this group before. I was asked to do the recruitment and make sure they are employed. My boss’s direction is simple...to make sure they go through the three months’ probation successfully” (Naran)

Naran further explained his reluctance to turn this initiative into a big project saying he was afraid of any mistakes in maintaining the good approach of supported employment:

“We started this initiative because we just want to give equal opportunities. Basically, that is what we wanted to do. We did not expect it to grow this big...because once it is so big, it will be sensitive... one mistake we make, it will appear on the media with the different format” (Naran)

In spite of this, Naran described how the project came to the attention of the media only after three months after the launch of the project. Starting from that, the company was also given attention by the government. Fortunately, the company’s initiative coincided with the SWD-JICA collaboration project of supported employment which was in its early stages. Later, the scheme was recognised by Keigo from JICA as part of the project and assistance and support were provided to the company:

“...when Keigo saw this, he said to me, Naran, you were already doing a job coaching system. I told him, it was not a job coaching system. It was training. I said that because I did not know what the job coaching is all about” (Naran)

Naran also said that he was grateful to the government and the NGOs for giving him the assistance and support to accomplish the project and improve their approach:

“...our success is not single handed. It is not we alone. It was the cooperation from JICA, DPwDD and Labour Department. We did not know how to go about it. We got a lot of support from these people. NGOs, especially people from United Voice, Malaysian Care and Persatuan Kanak-kanak Istimewa, Kajang (PKIK).”(Naran)

Single control of the scheme

Learning from the previous failures of other companies in employing persons with disabilities, Naran also emphasised the importance of the scheme being under the direction of the training unit and controlled by one person. With this strategy Naran believed that it is easier to control and lead to success:

“...because we learn from our experience. A lot of people handling disabled employees, and the whole projects were not successful. At this point, the project was successful because it was coordinated by one person. The Human Resource Director instructed that anything related to disabled employees should only be handled by me. Nobody can touch the project...” (Naran)

This sole decision of the training unit was revealed to be applied not only in the recruitment process but also in the placement recommendation. This is stressed by Eng:

“Training unit will brief us before they place someone in our store. Training unit will inform us how to handle them what are their problems. Normally, when they come we will prepare with one responsible staff to teach them how to do, otherwise they will be alone. Until maybe a month when they were free to move around, we allow them to do. Otherwise we just place them.”(Eng)

A further quotation from Marina indicated that:

*“When management placed the employee at our outlet, they always tell me that this disabled person cannot do heavy work, so between the four departments, the clothing department does not have a lot of heavy work. So we tried to put her there and monitored closely, if it suits her. Definitely, if we found the job does not fit with her, we will take her to another department.”
(Marina)*

A similar comment was expressed by Kumari:

The training unit will inform us these disabled staff are for this department...so, we followed the instruction and we observed their progress” (Kumari)

This indicated that the recruitment and placement had been exclusively administered by the training unit and managers at every outlet are highly dependent on the training unit in the process of selecting the best candidates among persons with learning difficulties and inculcating the career development among this group.

Fair policy in the recruitment and placement

Basically, Naran explained that the recruitment and placement process for persons with learning difficulties is arranged separately from other non-disabled candidates. The interview was mainly conducted to get to know the candidates whether they can understand and follow instructions. Then, their commitment to work will be assessed. After selecting the potential employees, an orientation session with the selected candidates and their parents was conducted to give information about the company and to brief the parents and carers about the roles the employees will be involved with. Then, they will proceed to have two-week training, which was simplified to match to their capacity of understanding.

Hamid noted that they, firstly, started the training without any skill in teaching persons with disabilities. Only after being assisted by JICA with the exposure to the supported employment model and the phases involved, the idea of systematic instructions and job coaching process were applied in the training. Sharing the idea of systematic instructions and job coaching, Hamid remarked that there are certain techniques in providing training for this group. Following through these techniques made him see the importance of recognising the ability of the trainees and allowing them to decide.

Naran said that the successful candidates were primarily offered jobs as Sales Assistants and placed in the nearest outlet to their family home. The placement was also made in accordance with their skills certificates. For instance, those with a bakery certificate will be placed at the bakery station. In addition, the employees were also asked about their preference of jobs. This is confirmed by Marina, who asked the employee's preference and matched it with the guideline from the training unit:

"We asked her preference and she told me that she likes to fold clothes. So, we arranged for her to be in the department. The management noted that this employee with learning difficulties usually cannot bear with any heavy work. That is why I put her in the clothes department. But these are trial and error. If she suits with the job, then she will stay. Otherwise, definitely she will be transferred to another department." (Marina)

Despite being placed by the training unit, Kamarul pointed out that some employees can also state their preference of outlet:

"Employee can select his own outlet. Some of them asked to go to the outlet near to their family home." (Kamarul)

As for the first phase, the interview was argued to be mainly through group interviews in which NGOs bring their potential candidates to the company. The candidate is accompanied either by parents or the NGO during the interview and the selection was made in groups by the recruitment team from the training unit. After seeing a positive impact from this supported employment, the mass interviews were expanded to be conducted at school for those who attend special education programme with the presence of the teachers.

This strategy was later enhanced with the collaborations with Vocational School of Indahpura, Johor. This effort made by the south regional office offered positive results with the proposal to employ the students who graduated from the school. Interview sessions were planned before the students finishing the school and 70 students were recruited for the first batch from the school. Kamarul noted that for the south region, their employees with learning difficulties were basically from Indahpura School, and had no connection with any NGOs in their area:

“For the first and second batch, we only contacted school or DPwDD. But later, we also received walk in candidates who are maybe friends of the employees in the outlet or maybe the ex-student of the school. Maybe their teacher passed the information about the vacancy.”(Kamarul)

Additionally, the salary scale for this group is reported to be equivalent to other non-disabled employees as Marina said:

“They receive the same salary scale as other workers and receive annual salary increment.” (Marina)

Naran pointed out that some employees who have no opportunities to earn additional pay by doing overtime are offered a higher basic salary.

Moreover, Hamid and Naran affirmed their agreement that this group will have similar treatment in terms of promotion. They mentioned two employees with learning difficulties who have been promoted as supervisors and another three employees who have had promotions to the administration office, doing the data entry for the master file.

However, when asked about the career path for employees with learning difficulties, Eng seems doubtful and still did not fully believe in the employees with learning difficulties to go further:

"Maybe...but it's a bit difficult" (Eng)

Having similar thoughts, Marina expressed her concern about the career development in terms of poor job enrichment practices in the company. Job enrichment means to offer employees to have opportunities to use range of their abilities in different kinds of work. Marina stated that although most of the employees with learning difficulties have been working between one to two years, it seems that there is no job enrichment practised in the company for this group. Marina stated that her worker had been at the same department since she started her work and doing the same kind of jobs. The only difference is that she has now changed from the ladies' unit to children's unit. However, sometimes when there is a labour shortage in other department, the employee with learning difficulties will sometimes be called on to move:

“When there is a necessity to any replacement in other departments, she will also involve. By this, she learnt something new such as tagging and labelling prices. But usually, we only asked them to stick the price tag, and other workers will print the price first.”(Marina)

Referring to the limited option for job enrichment for this group; Eng concluded that that there is only a slim possibility for job rotation since it is hard for them to learn new things:

“We just based on their abilities. So, it was very minimum possibility of job rotation for them... I couldn't see any rotation because they were still doing the same job. We didn't try to change them as we were obliged to the training unit. Normally, any changes happened would be informed. We also thought that their parents were also comfortable with the current position. I didn't think their parents wanted them to change their types of jobs. Non-disabled were different. They kept changing because we're trying to instil the multitasking employees.” (Eng)

Agreeing with the statement of limitations, Hasnita added that the decision of offering them the chance to do extra work was dependent on their ability in doing the job. Unless they show poor performance, they will have the opportunity to do different work:

“Sometimes, they have to work night shift, or do overtime job, depends on the department, how they perform, we have a problem with the manpower, sometimes they also do the stock date.”(Hasnita)

Similarly, Kumari noted the possibility of transfer was dependent on the performance:

“.., if we see they cannot cope with one department, we will change to the other department. It depends, but if they want to learn something new, they will ask to transfer to other department...if we change them, we will tell them, we're changing them to the other department, what will benefit them...we try not to stick them in just one department. They must be bored, so we try to transfer them too. And...it's good for us that they can do the job and to get other skill from other department...but it depends on their performance. (Kumari)

Referring to the boundaries drawn by the management to stick the employees with learning difficulties with certain kind of abilities and the restrictions in the possibility of job enrichment observed in the company, Marina considered this scenario as a barrier to their career development.

Assistive policies and supports

As to support offered to employees during the implementation of the scheme, the buddy system was mentioned as a strategy used to support this group of employees. Buddy system was described as to put an employee under a supervision of one colleague who is usually their immediate supervisor to support them:

“We didn’t have work trial first. Just started straight away and got together like buddy systems. Brought them and followed exactly, every day, and I see that it took very fast way for them to get accustomed.”(Eng)

“When we put them, then the immediate supervisor will be assigned to assist him, in just they want to ask something... Usually it is the supervisor.” (Hasnita)

They could seek help from their supervisor if anything happens:

“If they have any case that they want to complain, they have their own supervisor to report to. But so far, we don’t receive any. Normally, if anything, they will talk to their own supervisor.” (Eng)

This kind of approach was regarded as very beneficial by Hasnita because in her opinion, a person with learning difficulties is a very sensitive person, and if they come into contact with a person who does not really accept them, they will be upset. So, if their ‘buddy’ has been trained how to understand them, it

is easier. Besides, they were also introduced to other colleagues in the workplace to show the acceptance of all levels of staff:

We introduced her to other workers so that she will feel accepted as a team in the department. (Marina)

In addition, the disabled badge was introduced for employees with disabilities so as to signify to other employees and customers that they have certain disabilities. This is affirmed by Kumari:

“Every disabled employee was provided with a special badge identifying them as a disabled worker. Everyone wore it because it was good for them. With the badge, customer would know how to approach them” (Kumari)

While Hasnita believed the disabled badge is for protection, some of the employees were said to dislike the idea of wearing it because of labelling. Hasnita mentioned that:

“They were provided with a disabled badge, and we believed it was for protection. But some of them maybe feel embarrassed to wear or didn’t want to be labelled as persons with disabilities.”(Hasnita)

Some parents were also reported to object the idea of the disabled badge. However, the objections decreased after it was explained that the aim of the badge is for safety reasons.

Furthermore, in providing the assistive policies and support, it is evident that several managers took some initiatives and demonstrated their commitment to help the persons with learning difficulties to develop meaningful skills and experience when they were first assigned to their job. Hamid for instance

simplified the training module to match with the candidates' level of understanding while Marina used a timing scale to divide tasks:

"To simplify her work, I put her work on a timing basis. For example, from 9am to 10am, what she supposed to do...and then proceed to the next job after that..." (Marina)

Moreover, they suggested that a sense of tolerance and patience is needed towards employees with learning difficulties when they are in the process of building up their understanding of their job roles. Marina asserted that she had to be very responsive to her employee and carried on explaining the job tasks:

"She has been explained for their tasks many times but still she admitted that she did not understand... She never says that she did not understand but she asked meto repeat" (Marina)

She added that there was a need for sensitivity in dealing with persons with learning difficulties:

"We know that a person with learning difficulties is a very honest person. If we asked her to do something, she will do it without fail. That is why we have to monitor them. We do not want them to feel bored doing the same thing every time, every day. I myself feel pity to see her. So, I tried to give her other simple tasks. Sometimes, I myself feel pity on her.. Doing the same thing...she must be so bored. So, I approached her and sometimes approach her to do something else, for example, assembling the sensor or sticking the label code which could be done while sitting. So that she does not need to stand up all the time" (Marina)

Furthermore, persons with learning difficulties were described by most respondents as very vulnerable and sensitive to any inconsiderate treatment. Thus, they have to be approached with care and compassion. Afraid of any rough conduct from other employees, Kumari took the responsibility to personally deal with her employee with learning difficulties:

"I will guide them personally and bring them to the department and introduce to the other staff...tell them, any arising issues should be referred to me or their superior. We also inform them that if they found that they cannot complete the work we asked them to do, they can tell us. So, their voices will be listened to. We have one case; he cannot lift the heavy things, so we transfer him..."
(Kumari)

Some also drew attention to the safety support and transport that was provided to ensure employees wellbeing:

"In Johor Bharu outlet, the hostel provided is just 200m from the outlet. It is just 5 to 10 minutes walks. However, there will be a coach to transport them to the hostel if they work late. And there will be a hostel master to assist and support their security. We will not let them to go back without supervision."(Hasnita)

Reflecting on the managers' commitment to the scheme, 'passion' is claimed by Naran to be the secret recipe of its success. Believing in this, Naran declared that any work should be focused and infused with enthusiasm. Hamid reflected that having experience with his own disabled child helped him to respond to and understand this group of persons with learning difficulties. He said that this personal feeling in his heart has naturally given him the passion to help this group of people:

"I can conceive the difficulties their parents have faced in taking care of them. And every parent may be thinking and worrying about their children's life after their death. That is why I don't have any problem dealing with this group. I know how it feels as a parent... and I can understand how this group of people feel about others." (Hamid)

Likewise, Marina and Eng suggested that their sensitivity towards persons with disabilities is due to having relatives with similar conditions.

9.4 IMPACT OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

The impact of supported employment was not given much attention by the respondents since their main aim is to offer equal opportunities to this group and to focus on the way that the scheme works in the workplace.

Nevertheless, from the examples they gave in the interviews, they offered some evidence of ways that this supported employment scheme has had a positive impact to both the company and employees with learning difficulties.

9.4.1 Impact on the company

Appreciation from the customers regarding the company's initiatives of employing persons with disabilities is seen by some to contribute to the company's good image. Kumari also pointed out that the remarks and praise from customers to this programme is indirectly encouraging positive perceptions of the capacity of persons with learning difficulties:

"Sometimes customer give remarks, we have disabled staff. They gave compliment for our initiatives. People have the general perception in mind and think persons with disabilities cannot work. But when customer see disabled people working in the company, they appreciate that, even if they face any difficult situation, they can accept it...because they understand that the staff is persons with disabilities...I can say that we have a good image for employing persons with disabilities." (Kumari)

Meanwhile, Eng had an alternative view regarding the benefits of this supported employment to wider society:

"So far, we receive no customer complaint. After all, they should be considerate...it is for the benefit of the society...we are not taking an advantage but I think it is also kind of strategy for the society." (Eng)

Apart from the good image, it was suggested that persons with learning difficulties' are usually restricted to low skill jobs and that they remain in them. As these are the jobs which are often rejected by persons without disabilities, this initiative could be considered to be filling a gap in the labour market. Hence, it was argued that supported employment has resolved the labour shortage in the company. Marina and Eng pointed out this positive impact with reference to the retention problem:

"The management can solve the labour shortage problem. If we employ school leavers, they will just stay temporarily because of the boredom of the tasks." (Marina)

"But, it's also good things because sometimes in retails sector, we face difficulties to find people...even if we got, it's hard to remain them.. If we get this one [employee with learning difficulties] who is loyal...it is good then." (Eng)

Naran even added that the company currently started to expand the scheme to employ more persons with disabilities with the intention of solving this problem of turnover. Instead of only placing them at the sales assistant level, they also started putting this group of disabled people at the administrative level.

Moreover, the punctuality and discipline of this group were also portrayed as positive. Kumari asserted that this was good for the company since previously they were facing problems of punctuality and discipline with non-disabled employees:

"This scheme has given a good impact on the company. This is because as I said, you tell them A, they will do A. there will be no short cuts...they are obedient. They will always be there. They are very straightforward. So far, we don't have any absenteeism problem among this group. Even if they have their regular check-

up, they will inform me and ask to change their off day, they don't take medical leave.”(Kumari)

Hence, handling employees with learning difficulties was reported to be easier:

“Frankly, we have some staff that are very difficult to handle. But, for these people, we just treat them well and they will do it. We can trust them.” (Eng)

It was also suggested that the good work discipline among employees with learning difficulties might ultimately motivate other, non-disabled employees to reflect on their performance:

“If other staffs want to complain, they themselves are not doing their job. They would be ashamed because a disabled worker is more diligent than them.”(Marina)

When asked about the financial benefits the company could gain from the employment of persons with disabilities, Naran testified that they were in fact unaware about the benefits given by the government when they started the scheme. This was because their main intention was to give them employment and see how they performed. Only after being advised by the Labour Department regarding the tax deduction, they started applying for tax exemption.

9.4.2 Impact on the employees with learning difficulties

An increasing level of confidence and independence among employees with learning difficulties was the main impact pointed out by most respondents. From her observation of her employee with learning difficulties, Marina noticed positive changes in her confidence and social skills:

“When I first met her, she looked really timid but now she knows how to make friends. If she sees her friends, she will go and greet them. Another example, last time if she wanted to request for a leave, her father will contact me but now she herself could manage. Those are few developments I could see...” (Marina)

Marina believed that supported employment has helped her developed herself positively:

“We have helped them not to be dependent only on their parents and family. We have tried to expose them to the outside world. We gave her opportunity to work and mix with other people to boost her confidence. Furthermore, by having their own job and salary, they would not regard them as a burden for their family.” (Marina)

Similarly, Eng spoke of the development of independence skills among this group:

“On the first day, just looking around...but now, only every morning, we give briefing...they look getting better and look really independent. Sometimes, when their immediate superior comes in, they have known what they have to do on that day.” (Eng)

9.5 CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As the company was believed to play an important role in instigating the scheme, every officer interviewed was asked to share the challenges faced with regard to supporting persons with learning difficulties to be involved in the society throughout the country. In addition, they were also requested to provide suggestions and recommendations to improve and extend the scheme. Lastly, respondents' views were sought in relation to the effort required to enhance the implementation of supported employment in the future.

Five significant issues were connected concerning to the theme discussed, as follows:

- a.Lack of awareness among the community
- b.Parental attitudes and involvement
- c.Limited coverage in the special education curriculum
- d.Job restrictions for persons with learning difficulties
- e.Lack of quality support services

While most of the respondents touched in part on the issues mentioned, not every issue was discussed in depth by all officers.

9.5.1 Lack of awareness among the community

The majority of them expressed their disappointment with regard to the issue of awareness. Customers were described as quite shocked when they met disabled employees:

“When the customer makes a complaint and I told them that she is disabled employee, they were quite surprised and relieved. Their anger will go down.” (Marina)

Some of the customers, however, complained about the scheme and suggested that more job opportunities should be given to those non-disabled people who were unemployed:

“There are some customer who are annoyed to deal with disabled employee and described us as unwise to employ persons with disabilities while the country is facing on the unemployment problems among persons without disabilities” (Hamid)

Naran connected this issue with the importance of recognition from the government for such initiatives concerned with employment of persons with disabilities. He believed that through this recognition, the public would be more aware of the importance of supporting employment for this group.

Thus, he suggested the government should highlight and recognise any companies which start to employ persons with disabilities since this recognition means a lot for the private sector.

On top of that, Hamid recommended that exposure and coverage in the electronic media should be expanded so that the public would be more sensitive and concerned about persons with disabilities.

9.5.2 Parental attitudes and involvement

This issue of parental reluctance to expose their disabled children to involvement in the open communities was regarded as a serious problem by those interviewed. Parents were described as hesitant to release their disabled sons and daughters and afraid for their safety. But for Marina, the exposure is important to help them to get used to it. By this way, they can naturally, adapt to the changes later on. She considered the process to be similar to any new programme introduced by the governments. Therefore, more awareness and exposure for both parents and persons with learning difficulties were regarded as important to improve their future lives:

“More programmes should be conducted especially in the rural areas. Moreover, we have to involve the family since most of persons with learning difficulties are still under the family control. Some of them feel shy to mix their kids with other people. Promotion from one city to another should be intensified.”(Marina)

Clarifying this further, Marina stated her opinion that most of the employees hired in the company were seen to be from urban families who are aware of the importance of inclusion. In contrast, rural families maybe have no idea about the prospects of joining supported employment or they maybe know

but have no guidance about how to get it. For this reason, she hoped that those in the rural areas would be made more aware and that this scheme will be expanded to the rural areas to help them in receiving the same benefits.

9.5.3 Limited coverage in the special education curriculum

The next challenge noted was the limited coverage in the special education curriculum in terms of living skills. Naran highlighted his belief that the current curriculum which focuses more on sewing, handicraft and farming was outdated. He suggested restructuring the special education curriculum to 'the industrial potential curriculum' so as to prepare them to engage in economic activities in the open market later on:

"The special education has to look back at their curriculum. How many people open a tailor's shop out there? Look around and look at what industry want" (Naran)

In line with the same issue, Naran added that there should be greater collaboration between the school and industry. He suggested introducing a 'school adoption programme' by which any industry should adopt any school with the special education programme and provide a 'career simulation' based on its industry to expose students with the real world of work.

Mentioning about the centre of excellence for persons with disabilities recommended by the government, Hamid expressed his consent on this initiative to produce well-prepared candidates to enter the labour market. Yet, for Naran, the important thing to think about is the curriculum to be incorporated in the centre.

9.5.4 Job restrictions for persons with learning difficulties

Two respondents offered comments on the restrictions applied for persons with learning difficulties. Referring to the limitations of their ability perceived by the management, Marina emphasised the restricted functions for this group in relation to their capacity:

“These employees with learning difficulties were only placed in the hypermarket because hypermarket is a big workplace. And, we placed them to help the basic things. While in the supermarket which is smaller, one staff has to cover more work.” (Marina)

On the other hand, Eng elaborated the restrictions of functions and numbers for this group. For him, employing persons with learning difficulties is good *“but not too many”* and the recruitment should be based on the roles of the job and also the total number of staff in the outlet:

“...the suitability of the one per cent quota is relied on descriptions of job function. In certain functions, it is OK. May be in service centre... but not in the cashier line because it involves lots of money. So, I could say here, in certain area, can, and no problem. For this hypermarket, current 5-6 per outlet is sufficient. It depends on how many staff per outlet. It depends on how big is the outlet... in average 100-200 staff. This outlet is around 140 staff. So it is more than 1 per cent.”(Eng)

Apart from this, Eng hoped that the company will take extra measures to support the participation of persons with disabilities.

In contrast, Hasnita raised her agreement to recruiting more disabled workers:

“In fact we always try to contact the school to ask for new candidates.” (Hasnita)

It is apparent that employers are willing to employ persons with disabilities but still have restrictions in terms of functions and numbers.

9.5.5 Lack of quality support services

Hamid emphasised the quality of support services in sustaining the supported employment among persons with learning difficulties. The involvement of government officials should be improved, he said, since the current support received was supplied by NGOs. Though NGOs got the funding from the government, it is necessary to have the collaboration directly with the government.

Referring to the support from the Human Resource Development Fund (HRDF) on the job coaching assistance, Naran commented that until now, all the job coaches were trained through the SWD-JICA project but Malaysia need to sustain this services even after the project ends. Accordingly, Naran proposed collaboration from all parties of employer, NGOs, and governmental disability related ministries to bring together the strategic plans for the benefit of persons with disabilities.

9.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the analysis of managers' responses in relation to their understanding of the capacity to work among persons with learning difficulties and supported employment implementation in the company. It is clear that managers who have regular contact with employees with learning difficulties are able to articulate exactly their understanding of persons with

learning difficulties and appreciate their capacity to work at the same level as other non-disabled workers.

As can be seen from the initiatives and strategies developed by the company, it could be concluded that the employer has been really cautious and committed in their intention to offer job opportunities for persons with disabilities. Strategic plans and passion in steering the idea are seen to be essential to guarantee the success of the scheme. Moreover, support from all level of staff in the company is considered necessary to facilitate the achievement. The positive impact of supported employment to the company included promoting a good image for the company and solving the problems of turnover in the company.

Meanwhile, the challenges listed were relatively similar to the reflections of government officials discussed in previous chapter, involving the lack of awareness and involvement from the society, the inappropriate curriculum offered by the special education system which restricts the qualifications of the students and the poor quality of support services. Finally, recommendations to meet those challenges were discussed so as to improve the scheme in future.

In the following chapter, this issue of the ability to work among persons with learning difficulties and supported employment from the perspectives of coordinators of NGOs will be further explored. Besides, it will also look at the involvement of these organisations in initiating and developing the progress of supported employment in Malaysia.

CHAPTER 10
**NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS' PERSPECTIVES ON
PERSONS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES AND SUPPORTED
EMPLOYMENT**

10.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the analysis of the individual interviews carried out with the coordinators of three non-governmental organisations (NGOs) - Malaysian CARE, PERKOBP and United Voice (UV) (See Appendix 10.1) - representing the interests of persons with learning difficulties and their families by which these NGOs are generally run by those who have siblings or other family members with learning difficulties. These three NGOs were selected because of their active involvement in creating opportunities for persons with learning difficulties and in working in collaboration with the BZ Corporation which introduced the supported employment scheme. One representative from each organisation was individually interviewed. The interviews were conducted mainly in English.

Table 10.1 Details of Respondents (NGOs Coordinators)

No	Pseudonym	Age	Sex	Name of Organisation	Experience in organisation
1	Suzy	49	Female	United Voice	8 years
2	Lily	42	Female	Malaysian Care	17 years
3	Cheah	56	Male	PERKOBP	18 years

Though only three respondents were interviewed for the purpose of the chapter, the selection could be considered appropriate since all of them have extensive experience in relation to persons with learning difficulties and the issues that affect their lives. In addition to having between 8 and 18 years of

experience in the organisations, they also have personal experience of living with and supporting their siblings and sons and daughters who have learning difficulties. Not only do they have considerable personal experience in assisting their siblings and children; they also have a wealth of experience and strong commitment to improving the circumstances of other children and young adults and enabling them to lead their lives independently.

In this chapter, the perception about persons with learning difficulties will be firstly offered and the supports to employment will be discussed. Finally, the respondents' views on the challenges and recommendations in relation to the current situation of supported employment will be outlined.

10.2 KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF PERSONS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

This section will principally explore the perceptions of NGOs on persons with learning difficulties particularly in terms of their ability to enter the open labour market. Having been involved in training this group of persons with learning difficulties, these three respondents shared similar views regarding their employability. In summary, they assumed that when given opportunities, preparation and support, this group could obtain and keep a job and live as a meaningful life as any other person. Moreover, they could also be productive and perform as well as any other worker.

However, there were some contradictory views expressed in terms of placing them in supported employment. Two of the respondents have doubts about whether those assessed as having moderate levels of learning difficulties

could be placed in open employment while the other respondent strongly assumed the possibility as long as the right training and support was in place. In spite of confirming the employability among those with very mild learning difficulties, Cheah questioned the ability of persons with learning difficulties defined as being in the moderate range to join supported employment because of their limitation in social skills and interaction:

“... the reality is... in some cases they have to be in the sheltered employment” (Cheah)

Suzy who had similar thoughts noted that:

“...those who worked in [BZ Corporation], they are very high functioning...only very mild behavioural issues...but the challenge for us is to struggle for the severe ones... most of the people working downstairs [the sheltered workshop] are considered moderate and severe...”(Suzy)

Thus, it is apparent that both coordinators shared parallel ideas that the degree of impairments would determine the capacity to work in supported employment. For that reason, a sheltered workshop was introduced in PERKOBP and UV to cater for those defined as having moderate to severe range of learning disability.

On the other hand, Lily asserted that people always made generalisations about the inability of this group without genuinely understanding the individual. She strongly believed that with the right training and support persons with learning difficulties could be placed in open employment. Furthermore, a formal structure of training programmes was regarded as vital in producing a competent and proficient candidate to enter the labour market. In describing the training programme, she stressed that their competency

should be firstly assessed to know the right skills to be refined with each individual. By doing so, the support and assistance are given according to their needs. She clarified that:

“..to be able to know whether one is competent to work or not, we need to have some competency skills, what level they can go to work, what criteria. If they cannot meet them, we have to see how we can help and train them to work. From there, with the report, we will know where the child is right now, people always said...oh...this person cannot, what do you mean by cannot. How do you define...which area cannot. I believe that all of them actually can work. Assessments of competency are very important.”(Lily)

Believing in “*the right approach for the right person*”, Lily shared her experience in training young adults with ADHD who she said could hardly stand still, she emphasised the importance of different approaches of training and support to prepare them for work:

“I have one guy, who is very active...he cannot stand still for long. I get him a chart and said to him...finish this one and then come to see me, let me know...after fifteen minutes which is so quick, he come to me, knock... knock.... (knocking the door) ..finish... finish.. he said. And then, I ask him to do another one...and the same thing happen. So, at least he is doing something” (Lily)

This quotation briefly specifies that the training structure should be matched with the capacity of the trainee.

Commenting on the employability of this group it can be concluded that all of the respondents have confidence in the ability of this group to work in an integrated setting but regard them as being in need of training and preparation as well as support and assistance. However, those with moderate level of disability should be guided with a right approach parallel to

their potential. In addition, the lack of social skills is seen as an important area to be tackled in the training process.

10.3 SUPPORTING PERSONS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES TO EMPLOYMENT

In reviewing the support offered by NGOs, five major issues were identified as important in enabling persons with learning difficulties to enter and remain in employment: self-advocacy, training to employment, creating job opportunities, job coaching and supported employment scheme and supplying continuous support. It should be noted that these three organisations raised and discussed different issues according to their different aims and objectives.

10.3.1 Self-advocacy

In view of the fact that the focus of UV is self-advocacy, as might be expected, Suzy, the coordinator of this organisation placed particular emphasis on self-advocacy for persons with learning difficulties. The awareness of self-advocacy in Malaysia was reported to start in 1993 with the Bethany Home where the first self-advocacy group formed. However, this self-advocacy group was said to be quite slow in terms of development since self-advocacy is not their main activity. Whereas for UV, since it is set up for self-advocacy, it grew more rapidly as mentioned by Suzy:

“...for UV, it is set up for self-advocacy. It focuses on self-advocacy. So the focus is more on self-advocacy. That is why they are much focused, specialised. That is why UV expanded so much faster...” (Suzy)

Self-advocacy according to Suzy is a process whereby persons with learning difficulties speak and represent themselves in order to express what they really want. In general, it relates to fighting for their rights. Apart from giving training for self-advocacy, UV is also reported to provide help and support to learn more about their rights and become more responsible and independent in their lives. Therefore, rights to life in relation to key aspects of daily living such as rights to employment are considered as parts of self-advocacy which is struggling for an inclusive society and a more participatory approach. For example, joining the supported employment scheme is regarded as necessary to fulfil the rights to employment and rights for inclusion in the society. Therefore, members will try to improve and demonstrate their ability to work so as to join supported employment.

10.3.2 Training to employment

Referring to the familiarity of NGOs in living with and supporting persons with learning difficulties, all respondents shared the common worry of parents of this group on the future of their sons and daughters when they are no longer around. This anxiety made them realise that the best way to prepare their sons and daughters for the future is by preparing them to be useful persons, able to do meaningful work and to live independently.

Therefore, in fighting for the rights of persons with learning difficulties, various kinds of training are offered in an effort to prepare them to gain employment in the open market. PERKOBP, for example, offers an employment training programme to learn basic job skills and other types of

skills needed to support them to live independently while Malaysian CARE provides the work based training programme to expose trainees to the world of work.

In describing the training programme, the readiness programme for employment is pointed out by Lily and Cheah as an important training to be delivered to the trainees. This involves a training needs analysis to identify the types of skills which need to be developed. This transition phase will allow them to be prepared for the world of work as the environment in an integrated setting is regarded as insecure compared to the sheltered employment:

“This is a transition, from here to open market also another transition...very sheltered, safe environment but when you come out to open employment it is not safe anymore.”(Lily)

Structured training programme has been illustrated in PERKOBP and Malaysian CARE to meet the essential criteria of skills required by the trainees. Working skills were reported to be developed by training them in the basic jobs such as making cards, packing magazines and folding letters to the envelopes.

The employment training programme in PERKOBP was described as officially starting with the job contract of cutlery packing from Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) in 1993. In describing the working skills, Cheah testified that the packing requirements are used as the training grounds where the job functions were simplified to suit the capacity of persons with learning difficulties as mentioned by Cheah:

"We break down the job to many steps; students learn how to identify, to count and to put in."(Cheah)

Moreover, PERKOBP also introduced the factory system of work which operates five days a week with a standard 9am to 4pm working hours.

Apart from doing the basic jobs, the trainees are also introduced to social skills, skills with money and daily living skills. The social and money skills involve buying food and socialising in the break time where a small cafe with food is set up to represent the real situation of working lives. Lining up for a meal, paying for their food and eating together with their peers are all considered part of the training. Moreover, living skills such as cleaning the toilet or sweeping the floor are also included in the training with a monthly rotation duty roster.

Describing in detail the training programme in Malaysian CARE, Lily described the current model of employment training in the organisation: the work based programme. The work based programme consists of a work preparation model and modular lessons; involves educating people with learning difficulties about the concept of work, offering the opportunity to gain different types of work experience, providing the opportunity to self-evaluate strengths and needs in job matching, opportunity for potential clients being absorbed into gainful employment and building rapport with employers. While the work preparation model is conducted at the training centre, the modular model engages the trainees in the real employment scenario.

Explaining further, Lily noted that the training programme is divided into two levels; in-house centre-based and employment support programmes. The in-house centre based offers living skills and independent living programme. During this level, apart from practising different kinds of work, the trainees will be exposed to social skills in relation to their co-workers and supervisor through role play and practical training. The money skills, mobility skills and good manners were also stressed in the training to introduce them to independent living.

Lily then added that when the readiness for employment skills assessment shows that they are ready to work, they will then be put in the second level of employment support programme. At this level, job placement and job coaching are offered as explained by Lily:

“If we find they are competent to work, we will place them out in open employment... not so much a job placement actually, they will be put in probation, and they will not get pay for the first few months, after the employer found they are good enough, the employer will pay. So this is what we are actually doing.” (Lily)

In addition, a well-structured training based on the real employment scenario such as the working time and the basic rules at the workplace were also arranged to give a picture of the working life:

“The training is scheduled 4 days a week-Monday to Thursday-with the working hours of 9am to 4.30am. If they want to apply for a leave they have to fill the form and if they are sick, they have to give the medical certificate.”(Lily)

10.3.3 Creating job opportunities

In response to parents' concerns about their sons' and daughters' futures and their aspirations to provide better lives for them, various activities of employment have been tried by the organisations to create more job opportunities for those who are unable to gain jobs in open employment. Cheah said that PERKOBP started their employment training programme after considering their trainees' ability to do any job tasks with training and support. It is believed that by giving them chances to do the tasks, they will slowly learn the skills and manage to fulfil the task though a longer time is needed.

He then shared his thoughts about PERKOBP's failure to place the trainees with moderate level of disability in supported employment for the second phase of the supported employment scheme in the retail outlets. However, this failure gave them a new impetus to create alternative employment to serve the needs of this group. Starting with a sheltered workshop with a contract to package magazines, PERKOBP started to think about commercial employment. Cheah revealed that PERKOBP initiated the idea of a laundry with the aim of engaging the commercial company to offer job opportunities for the trainees and at the same time to establish an independent business. Overall, this project was regarded as successful since they managed to get contracts from two hotels and make up to RM4000 monthly profit.

Concerning the difficulty in placing the person assessed as having a moderate to severe level of learning difficulties in supported employment, UV similarly established an Employment Project within the organisation's building to provide sheltered employment for this group. This Employment Project has three different kinds of productions: Card & Craft Studio, Bakery and Art Gallery. Suzy reported that this income-generating project has yielded remarkably increasing returns over the years which will open more job opportunities for the UV members. Accordingly, selling the products will not only create employment for the members but also create public awareness of the potential of persons with learning difficulties.

In addition, it should be noted that employees in both PERKOBP and UV are paid a monthly salary and an annual bonus. On top of that, they are also receiving a Disabled Worker allowance of RM300 from the Development for People with Disabilities Department (DPwDD).

10.3.4 Job coaching and supported employment

In response to the job coaching and supported employment issue, all respondents explained that job coaching and supported employment had been implemented in their NGOs. In fact, Lily pointed out that Malaysian CARE had started the job coach system and placed persons with learning difficulties in open employment settings since 1993. Cheah also mentioned about successfully placing 20 out of 25 trainees who graduated from PERKOBP since 1995 with job coach support from Malaysian CARE. In addition, Suzy recognised her involvement in placing the members of UV in a

few small private industries. These examples were evidence that job coaching and supported employment have been established for some time in Malaysia though on a small scale and in more private industries or smaller companies.

Despite this fact, Suzy put the view that job coaching and supported employment was only fully accepted by Malaysian government and the community more generally when the SWD-JICA project introduced the job coaching system in 2005. Moreover, Suzy added that the new scheme of supported employment in BZ Corporation which started in 2007 was also generally regarded as the starting point of the implementation of supported employment for persons with learning difficulties in Malaysia. This corporate kind of approach with a much larger scale of recruitment was credited with having a substantial impact in enhancing the awareness among the public of the capacity of this group to join mainstream employment. In addition, JICA was deemed to provide this transformation of supported employment in Malaysia. Nevertheless, as Suzy remarked, job coaching and supported employment is still at a very initial stage and not fully practised.

10.3.5 Continuous employment support

Another key issue pointed out by Lily is the importance of continuous employment support after the placement. Sometimes, this group of persons with learning difficulties faced the problems of loneliness at the workplace such as having no friends or being bullied by their co-workers. Lily stressed this situation by sharing her experience:

“The challenges we faced are that we placed them out and they work, but they said they are lonely, with no friends. I just talked with one job coach and she said that one guy working in the company now make ‘muka masam’ (long face), when people talked to him, he refused to talk” (Lily)

Realising the fact that continuous support is needed after the recruitment, a monthly dynamic group session was introduced in Malaysian CARE. This dynamic group aims to bring together those placed in open employment to share their experience of working in the new environment. They can freely voice any challenges they faced at work with their peers and a facilitator will guide them to overcome any problems faced. Lily believed that by sharing with others, people will feel a sense of relief and reduce frustration or loneliness.

10.4 REVIEW ON SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT FOR PERSONS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

As mentioned, all these three NGOs have direct and indirect contribution in the supported employment scheme in BZ Corporation. Members from these organisations were placed in the company in the first and second phase in 2007 and 2008. Identical evaluation was expressed by the respondents who believed that the company had given a great opportunity for persons with learning difficulties to work and have meaningful lives coupled with the opportunity to be promoted and receive an annual salary increment of RM50.

Being in the organisation which has been a partner in the development of the scheme, Suzy shared a more comprehensive view compared to the other respondents. She firstly expressed her impression of the company which

portrayed itself as very compassionate in implementing the scheme with this group of persons with learning difficulties. She explained:

"In terms of implementations, we can see a very smooth development. They are very tolerant. They do not easily sack the employee. Though there are complaints here and there but it is normal." (Suzy)

Referring to the success of the scheme, Suzy noted that the rationale of the success is not only because of the capacity of the employees with learning difficulties, but also the positive support given by the company to the employees. BZ Corporation was also described as having a good partnership with NGOs, continuously seeking advice and following the guidelines drawn up by them. For example, the company was advised to avoid placing the candidate with learning difficulties as a cashier because of their inability to solve any unforeseen issue that might arise. The employees with learning difficulties also are restricted from doing evening shift as a precaution. The company seemed to follow the restrictions. Furthermore, Cheah added that the company's structured plans in conducting the employment support such as the training and buddy system for this group were correspondingly contributing to the success of the scheme.

Drawing attention to the impact of supported employment, Suzy drew attention to the fact that in addition to the high retention rate, the scheme was seen to increase employees' self-esteem and lead them to independent lives as she said:

".. it has pushed their self-esteem as a human adult and step to independence. Once they are employed they are very happy...that

*is why they are so loyal because they know it is hard to get a job”
(Suzy)*

Suzy also reported that this scheme simultaneously motivated other colleagues in the sheltered workshop to improve their performance in order to get a better job. Parents also started realising their sons’ and daughters’ potential to lead their lives independently. She even mentioned that some parents said that they could now die in peace.

Another issue highlighted by Suzy is the debates among disabled employees and their families about the disabled tag provided by the company. She said that some feel secure but others refuse to wear because of pride and dignity. They do not want to be labelled as disabled. Furthermore, while the employer sees the card for safety, the parents view is the opposite. They are afraid that the disabled tag will easily reveal their sons’ and daughters’ disability and people will take the opportunity to do something bad to them. In short, they see the disabled tag as the key to danger. However, according to Suzy, after further discussion, the employer agreed to suggest that employees to wear the tag in the first three months for easy identification and after that it can be left to their discretion.

10.5 CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Since NGOs were perceived to start providing support and giving significant contributions in creating opportunities for persons with learning difficulties, it is not surprising to see the emphasis on the challenges faced by the respondents. Five significant issues related to the challenges and

recommendations in enabling this group to have meaningful employment and better lives were outlined as follows:

- a. Limited understanding and awareness among parents and carers
- b. Lack of promotional activities to create awareness
- c. Inappropriate education and training curriculum
- d. Inadequate funding and support from the government
- e. A misconception about volunteerism

10.5.1 Limited understanding and awareness among parents and carers

Comparing to the situation in Europe which is regarded as positively moving towards struggling for their rights, Suzy pointed out about the unwillingness among parents and carers to fight for their rights and those of their children:

“..Malaysian parents don't even fight for anything...only small members of parents who are fighting. The rest are just waiting and see what will come. Some just accept the fact that this is the fate of their child. They just resolve that. They have the life of their own. Rights based are not practised in Malaysia. But if parents know their rights, they will do the thing that they think...they will try to fight” (Suzy)

This quotation briefly suggests that this unwillingness is associated with a limited understanding and awareness among parents and carers. Otherwise, they will go further and fight for their rights. It is evident that few organisations were formed by the parents in Malaysia like PERKOPB, CHILD and Seri Mengasih. Even PERKOPB started off by interest of parents to set up employment training for their children. Therefore, the respondents argued that parents and carers should be educated to give them more understanding and awareness about their sons' and daughters' rights.

In addition, despite of the main issue of parental support, Suzy pointed out that parents' understanding and awareness is related to how schools educate both the children and the parents. She believed that a good educational system could influence and educate the parents about their rights.

Looking from the perspectives of ethnicity and religion, Suzy highlighted that these three organisations are all coordinated by Chinese people and receive funds mostly from the churches and Christians organisations or individuals. She also noted the complaints from Malay parents about having no specific Malay organisations which cater for this group with learning difficulties compared to other groups of impairments. Reflecting on the fact that there is less participation by the Malay community in the organisation, she said that UV was the only organisation to which Malays belonged compared to Malaysian CARE and PERKOBP. Suzy revealed that some Malay members admitted that the low participation among other Malays with learning difficulties in the organisations is because some parents noticed that these NGOs received contribution from the churches which made them feel uneasy to join such organisations. Elaborating further on the complaints and frustration of Malay members, she noted that not many Malays volunteer to serve on NGOs or to participate in any fund raising events compared to other ethnic groups except for parents of the organisation members.

10.5.2 Lack of promotional activities to create awareness

In considering the low awareness among parents and the community as a whole, promotional activities aimed at raising consciousness on the rights of persons with learning difficulties were reported as still quite limited. Suzy commented that parents were commonly informed about the organisation through word of mouth or from the teacher's recommendations. However, it is fortunate that the issue of persons with learning difficulties started to be covered by the mass media recently and more information about the activities relating to this group was made available to the public. The national newspaper, The Star, was pointed out by Suzy to have a regular monthly column called 'One Voice' reporting on the issues concerning persons with learning difficulties.

Despite positive changes and developments in the government agencies responsible for upholding the rights of persons with learning difficulties, Suzy felt that there was still much to do:

"..I see the changes, I think the government sector has changed also, with the convention, even though people will never be satisfied but from my point of view, at least they started talked about it in the parliament. At least DPwDD has been moving faster than before; Labour Department is there to help. I see it is moving. And now, our members can go to the meeting without the staff because they got the support from other disabled people. In that sense, Malaysia has gone far in terms of acceptance but for the society in the whole, we still very far in educating." (Suzy)

From the quote, it is apparent that change is in progress and people have started accepting this group as part of the society. However, awareness is still seen as very limited.

Moreover, persons with learning difficulties in rural areas were reported to face more difficulty not only in terms of placement in supported employment but also in terms of teachers' understanding and awareness of their ability to work. Thus, Suzy stressed that awareness of the ability of persons with learning difficulties and their loyalty to work should also be comprehensively publicised.

In addition, the benefits offered by the government for those companies employing disabled people as mentioned in Chapter 2 were not clear to most companies. Hence, Suzy proposed that clear information regarding those benefits especially the double tax allowances and the newly approved policy of the availability to claim the Human Resource Development Fund (HRDF) for job coach assistance, should be publicised to attract more potential employers. She believed that the dissemination of this important information should be intensified to achieve the goal of a caring society.

With reference to this disability awareness, Suzy also pointed out the need for government officers to be alerted about persons with learning difficulties. She hoped that with the empathy and compassion, the government officers would understand more about the efforts of NGOs to provide an inclusive setting for this group.

10.5.3 Inappropriate education and training curriculum

Another important challenge mentioned by respondents is the inappropriate education and training curriculum. The special education curriculum was described as not being tailored to the need of persons with learning

difficulties to enter the labour market. Lily for instance commented on the curriculum which placed more emphasis on personal grooming and the general guidelines outlined to be utilised by both primary and secondary school. Referring to the general guidelines provided, Suzy highlighted that it depends on the creativity and initiatives of the teachers to apply the guidelines in their teaching:

"It is left to the teacher's creativity to cover the teaching programme, with so many students to take care of, many teachers are burnt out." (Suzy)

In clarifying this inadequate curriculum, Suzy said that the frustration among most parents about the special education encouraged them to send their sons and daughters to NGOs to join the employment training programmes which were regarded as more practical. Suzy stated that:

"Parents think it is waste of time sending them to school. If they cannot learn ABC, they can learn other things" (Suzy)

On top of that, inclusive education was reported to be ineffective. Self-awareness as well as social awareness was not inculcated in the students' minds. As a result, the students were said to grow up without understanding the need to accept their own disability. According to Suzy:

"..the integrated programme, if it works well as documented, it can be a good system, but at the moment, the recess time is separate, teachers still worry about bullying, they have to stop bullying issues. Only then good buddy system can be generated. It is not an easy issue." (Suzy)

Furthermore, the only vocational school of Indahpura which was offering courses for this group was considered insufficient to cater for all students with learning difficulties:

“They talked about vocational, they talked about Indahpura, but one in the whole country, it is not enough” (Suzy)

It is believed that with a structured education system, more chances will be opened for this group to step further. Hence, all the respondents shared the views that education should be improved especially in terms of transition. Furthermore, Lily particularly suggested that the readiness programme should be instigated to help the transition for this group due to the need for extra time to learn and understand. With this transition, she assumed that the employees who are hired will be more prepared physically and mentally.

For that reason, Suzy strongly believed that self-advocacy should be started at the very beginning to enable persons with learning difficulties to develop their maximum potential and have a strong voice of their own. She noted that she is currently planning the collaboration programme with Special Education Division (SED) to include a self-advocacy programme in the special education curriculum.

Sharing similar attitudes on this early education, Cheah and Lily also stressed the importance of the early intervention programme (EIP) in the school at the early stage in order to give a better understanding to children of their later lives. While for primary school, Lily suggested that work on social skills should be introduced at an early stage to enable children to learn social interaction. Moreover, Lily suggested that the curriculum should be enhanced with an emphasis towards social enterprise working skills which would provide opportunities for the students to earn their own money in settings such as such as bakeries, laundries and nurseries.

10.5.4 Inadequate funding and support from the government

Funding and support from the government was presented as another challenge faced in administering the organisations. Since DPwDD is the custodian of the funding for disabled people, most organisations depend on financial assistance from the department to run the organisations' activities. However, it was reported that DPwDD will only provide a variety of financial assistance to NGOs which are offering support for persons with disabilities in terms of education and early childhood intervention. Therefore, since UV and PERKOBP are not dealing with education or intervention, Suzy and Cheah noted that it was difficult for them to get the government funding. As a result, the organisations have to either urge the parents to give a monthly contribution for the training or seek the funding from other sources.

In addition, in terms of partnership with the government agencies, Lily expressed her frustration at working with government officers:

"Whenever we have meetings, we do share about this. Ministry is still ministry. For example, we talked about Early Individual Education Plan; we have done it back since 1996. We shared that with them but nothing much changes!"(Lily)

Hence, positive partnership among agencies was promoted by all respondents as important as stressed by Suzy and Cheah:

"My encouragement to the company is to adopt school, they identify few schools at their areas and adopt the school and give funding to set up the vocational. This is the positive approach for the school encouragement to prepare them to work." (Suzy)

"What we need to do, actually the government agencies have to work together with employers and NGOs to come out with ideas how to create more opportunities." (Cheah)

10.5.5 A misconception of the voluntary sector

Referring to the association of work in NGOs with charity or voluntary work, Suzy argued for the need to change the way of thinking about the voluntary sector and to move towards professionalism. With the unattractive salary offered, it is very hard to get involvement from professionals to support the organisation. Suzy highlighted this in her quote:

“My salary is RM3000 plus. It’s not very fair compared to my other colleagues who are working either in the public or private sector, the salary is more charity based. We have to change to the professional based. We need to offer higher benefit. Some of our staff is from Form 5 and receive competitive salary compared to outside...RM1300, so this is kind of issue should be considered for NGO in Malaysia. Most organisations are like that. MAB, Down Syndrome Association, their pay is better. The other like Malaysian Care pays less. We want trained people, quality staff, we have to pay. I think if we want high qualified, if we want to expand into training, research development, to move on, then we need more people to share their expertise with the organisation..” (Suzy)

Therefore, the salary in her opinion should be attractive in order to appeal to more experts who could contribute to the organisations.

10.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter comprehensively discusses the understanding of persons with learning difficulties from the perspectives of NGOs before moving to detail their provision of support in encouraging the participation of persons with learning difficulties in the labour market.

The findings from this study provide a deeper understanding on the ability of persons with learning difficulties to join the labour force and the support given to the group. The employability of this group is believed to lead them to

meaningful lives provided with training and support. It could be clearly suggested that the respondents seemed to be more specific in discussing the capacity of this group by distinguishing between the different levels of impairments of the individual. It could be concluded that the employability of persons with learning difficulties are seen to be varied based on the level of disabilities especially in terms of their limitation in social skills and interaction. But with the initiatives and strategies developed by NGOs, many persons with learning difficulties have been included in the community.

Referring to the training and support needed by this group, NGOs have shown their initiative to create a transition programme to train this group with learning difficulties before bringing them to the integrated setting of employment. Not only that the training exposes them with the basic jobs skills, they are also inculcated with social skills. While for those with moderate to severe level of disabilities, realising their need for special attention, NGOs believed to stick to the sheltered employment by which an internal employment project is introduced in the organisation.

Given that these three NGOs were actively involved in the development and implementation of supported employment, it is commented that supported employment has been practised in a small scale since 1990s by the NGOs. However, they admit that JICA has given a breakthrough in pushing the government to promote the idea of supported employment in Malaysia. They see the positive impact of supported employment not only on the lives of the recipients in terms of self-confidence and achieving independent lives, but

also to motivate other members of the NGOs who regarded supported employment as helping their aspirations to have a better future.

Reviewing the implementation of the scheme, it is agreed that a strong commitment is essential to ensure the success of supported employment. The willingness and commitment of JICA and the employer in supporting this supported employment is regarded as the key to success. The training programme, buddy system and disabled tag were regarded as a positive initiatives provided by the employer.

Despite this development, many challenges were outlined showing the difficulties in enhance the services for this group especially the limited understanding and awareness among the public and employers as well as the government officers- especially from the Malay families who are describe as having low participation or involvement in volunteerism. Promotions for the rural areas are also limited. More active promotions are needed to increase the awareness among public and employers.

The next chapter will present the discussion of the findings related to five different approaches or participants of data collection namely; survey, group interviews with employees with learning difficulties and individual interviews with the government officer, employer and NGOs.

CHAPTER 11

DISCUSSION

11.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous five chapters have presented the findings of this study by reporting data from different sources independently; each chapter intended to produce as clear as possible description of the perspectives of a particular group of actors. This chapter attempts to form a more holistic understanding by recognising consistencies and inconsistencies in their responses and identifying connections, commonalities and discrepancies which add to or go beyond the existing literature to provide new interpretative insights. In some cases, the latter mainly extend to Malaysia for the first time research evidence that has been established for other countries. In other cases, they add new aspects to the general body of research in this field.

Based on Table 5.1, reproduced as Table 11.1 here, the analysis, interpretation and synthesis of the findings are organised accordingly into the following categories which relate to the research questions identified in Chapter 1: persons with learning difficulties and capacity to work, supported employment, and evaluation. These three categories were used to initiate coding of the qualitative data and guided presentations of the findings and discussions.

The next three sections of this chapter are devoted to drawing together the empirical findings from earlier chapters relating them to these research questions, followed by a section with some concluding reflections. Before

doing so, however, it is worth reviewing briefly some of the limitations of the evidence being used.

Table 11.1 (5.1): Details of Information Needed

	Research Questions	Information needed [What the researcher need to know]	Methods
PERSONS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES AND CAPACITY TO WORK			
Research Question 1: To what extent persons with learning difficulties are capable to join supported employment?			
1a	How do persons with learning difficulties perceive their capacity in joining supported employment?	- perceptions of employees on their own capacity in joining supported employment	Survey Group Interview
1b	How do others perceive the capacity of persons with learning difficulties to join supported employment?	- perceptions of the officials, managers and NGOs on the capacity of persons with learning difficulties to join supported employment	Interview
SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT			
Research Question 2: What are the factors that influence the emergence of supported employment in Malaysia?			
Research Question 3: How has supported employment for persons with learning difficulties been implemented?			
2a	What influences the development of supported employment in Malaysia?	- factors which supports the development of supported employment in Malaysia	Interview
2b	What influences the development of supported employment in the company?	- motivations that influence the initiative of supported employment	Interview
3a.	What activities did the employer engage in to implement supported employment?	- strategies planned by the company in implementing supported employment	Survey Group Interview Interview
3b	How have the government and NGOs encourage supported employment?	- support given by the government and NGOs in promoting supported employment	Interview
3c.	What are the challenges in implementing supported employment?	- challenges faced in implementing supported employment	Interview
3d.	What are the recommendations to enhance supported employment?	- suggestions proposed to improve or enhance the scheme	Interview
EVALUATION			
Research Question 4: How has supported employment affected the lives of persons with learning difficulties, socially and economically?			
4a	What are the experiences of persons with learning difficulties in supported employment?	- views shared by employees with learning difficulties on their experiences in joining supported employment	Survey Group interview Interview
4b	What are the impacts on the employees with learning difficulties?	- impacts on the employees' personal and social development	Survey Group interview Interview
4c	What are the impacts on the company?	- impacts on the company	Interview

11.1.1 A note on the limitations of the evidence

Every study has its own limitations and, for this study, these are the problem of relating the findings to other evidence, the representativeness of the data for the case considered, and its generalisability to other cases.

In general, the lack of research literature pertaining to employment opportunities for persons with learning difficulties in Malaysia means that there is little evidence with which to compare the findings presented here in any direct way. Thus the process of interpretation of some of the findings is a rather isolated one and this cannot easily be remedied by going to other countries with similar socio-economies and cultures because of a similar lack of evidence available for them also.

Representativeness of the evidence collected for the company case study is affected by the response rates for the survey among those in the supported employment scheme and the representativeness of those employees who were then interviewed. The survey was confined to outlets mostly in the central zone. However, because of the central control of the scheme by the Human Resources and Training department at the headquarters across the outlets, it is reasonable to generalize the study's findings to the national practices of the company as a whole.

In terms of the gender of study participants, the majority were male: 13 female employees responded to the survey and 5 female employees were

interviewed, compared to 44 male survey respondents and 18 male interviewees. In fact, the administrative data of the company show that only 25 per cent of the employees with learning difficulties are female. So the above balance of women and men as survey respondents and interviewees is not greatly out of line with this.

Whilst, in terms of the ethnic background, majority of study participants were Malay: 30 Malay employees answered the survey and 11 Malay employees involved in the group interviews, compared to 18 Chinese and 7 Indians who responded to the survey and eight Chinese and three Indian who were interviewed. In spite of the fact that there is imbalance between the ethnic groups, looking at the equal distribution of percentages for both sample and population, it could be regarded that the respondents represent quite well the whole population of employees with learning difficulties in the company.

Finally, the interview schedules for employees, managers, government officers, and NGO coordinators were specially developed for the study. The choice of questions was therefore, in some cases, influenced by the workplace context and mix of tasks undertaken in the organisation concerned; different or additional perspectives might emerge with a schedule designed for other contexts.

The study was thus confined to the employees with learning difficulties in one particular company. Moreover, since this company focuses on the retail sector, its relevance for other sectors such as manufacturing or other services will be limited. In addition, given the uniqueness of the case and the

relatively early stage of the experience captured with supported employment for employees with learning difficulties, this is another reason for not speculating about generalisability of its findings to other settings.

11.2 PERCEPTIONS OF CAPACITY TO WORK

According to Hendey and Pascall (2001) in their study of young disabled adults in the United Kingdom, making the transition from childhood to adulthood, as well as providing a route away from poverty and social exclusion, employment also gave respondents;

Daily activity, self-confidence, independence, control over day to day life, a place in society, an escape from the stigma of claiming benefits and concomitant sense of identity as an equal citizen.
(Hendey & Pascall, 2001: 30)

The findings in Chapter 7 highlight this value of work to persons with learning difficulties. They seemed to believe that their life becomes more structured and balanced since they have their daily routines, and more meaningful as they able to make friends with non-disabled in the community (Adams & Oldfield, 2012). Moreover, the opportunity to join the labour market is grasped to show their abilities, which are underestimated in public views. In addition, it satisfies their wishes to fulfil parental expectations in raising their aspirations to join the scheme.

Believing in these substantial impacts of work on their lives, employees with learning difficulties show their eagerness to have a right to education and training that maximises opportunities to demonstrate their abilities and achieve full potential to lead fulfilling lives. However, the enthusiasm to work

in an open employment setting is a separate issue from the extent to which they are ready to do so. We consider, first, the perceptions of those with learning difficulties and then the perceptions of others.

11.2.1 Reflections on their capabilities by persons with learning difficulties

It is apparent that most employees with learning difficulties reported to be selected by their teachers or trainers judged from their abilities to do the work along with other non-disabled employees as noted in previous studies (Bass & Drewett, 1997; Walker, 2000; Weston, 2002; Wistow & Schneider, 2003). Being selected to join supported employment means a lot to them; demonstrating that they have acquired certain levels of ability to compete with other non-disabled employees. Furthermore, it also distinguished them from other persons with the same level of disability or more severe learning difficulties. Being recognised in this way by those regarded to be in positions of power, such as parents, teachers, trainers and employers confirmed their capabilities.

Besides, although there is evidence of illiteracy among a small number of those described in Chapter 7, nearly all have basic education without any difficulties in reading and writing in either Malay or English or their mother tongue. The high proportions of respondents in the study who have training and vocational skills also signify that most of them have moderate levels of learning disability. This could be understood based on the policy of the special education system in Malaysia, which only accepts those with

moderate to mild learning difficulties in mainstream public school and training establishment (Special Education Division, 2008) as mentioned in Section 2.4.1.

Thus, it could be concluded that having certain capabilities and eligibility of enrolment in public schools and training demonstrated the higher level of ability among participants in this supported employment scheme. This finding correspond with the general research literature which suggests that a majority of persons with learning difficulties who join the labour market are those who are less impaired (McGaughey *et al.*, 1995; West *et al.*, 1992). In addition, the degree of moderate disability is implied by the fact that they perceived very minimal limitations in describing their difficulties and had a relatively optimistic view of their abilities to understand and complete their current jobs as discussed in Chapter 6.

Reflecting on their abilities to work, persons with learning difficulties generally showed confidence in their employability. More than half of the survey respondents did not believe that their learning difficulties had a negative impact on their job performance (see Section 6.2.2). Moreover, 80 per cent of respondents believed they have similar capabilities to those of non-disabled employees since they are confident about doing basically the same job as non-disabled employees (see Section 6.2.4). Some of them might even choose not to identify themselves as disabled. They tried to distinguish themselves from others who have more severe difficulties and considered themselves as equal to non-disabled people. This is reflected in

the issue of the disabled badge imposed by the employer which is claimed by persons with learning difficulties to label them and underestimate their abilities (see Section 7.3.2).

Since the respondents mostly have a moderate level of disability, they regarded themselves as having no problem and able to work. Nevertheless, they emphasised their difficulties in communication and interaction with people as the most significant description of their disabilities, compared to other difficulties experienced in their daily routines (see Section 6.2). This could be understood by the fact that the repetitive kinds of tasks, which suit their abilities, have enabled them to adjust easily and stick to their routines but communication and interaction may be more challenging for them to deal with. In addition, since most having the first-time experiences joining an integrated setting of work, by which 37 per cent have had no job experience before joining the supported employment scheme and 75 per cent of those having job experience revealed only working with relatives (see Section 6.2.3), dealing with non-disabled employees and customers is perceived as a new experience for them.

Therefore, it could be concluded that regardless of believing in their own abilities, employees with learning difficulties are aware of their limitations and weaknesses, especially in having no specific qualifications to apply for jobs and a lack of communication skill. Hence, they accepted whatever job is offered to them and tried their best to express their thankfulness by showing good attitudes at work and being loyal to the employer.

11.2.2 Other views on the employability of persons with learning difficulties

Apparently in contrast to the positive picture regarding the abilities to work in supported employment obtained from persons with learning difficulties, their employability is doubted not only by employers or government officials but also even by teachers or coordinators who are believed to have a close relationship with this group (see Chapter 8, 9 and 10). This doubts of others about the ability of those with learning difficulties to contribute productively at work is in agreement with previous studies (Purvis *et al.*, 2006; Stevens, 2002; Wehbi & El-Lahib, 2007) which mentioned the low expectations of disabled people among employers.

Persons with learning difficulties in the study are perceived to be lacking in self-confidence and not yet ready to participate in the “real world”. They are frequently described as lacking social skills, especially the social contact and interaction skills, parallel to the affirmation made by employees with learning difficulties. They are usually not treated as ‘manpower’. Only one of the respondents, Keigo, had a positive view on the ability of this group to work in an integrated setting (see Section 8.2.2). This form of scepticism would normally be thought to come from a lack of knowledge of persons with learning difficulties but is also found among those professionals who are engaged with the supported employment programme in Malaysia.

This finding supports Ramakrishnan’s study of Malaysian employers’ perception which found no significant differences in recruitment between

employers with and without disabled employee (Ramakrishnan, 2007) but also questions other previous research findings that sensitivity on disability issues is developed by frequent contact with disabled people. Needels & Schmitz (2006), for instance, in a UK study, discuss differences in perceptions of and in the tendency to recruit persons with disabilities between employers who employ disabled people and those who have no or few such employees.

Referring to the psychological reasons for the biased treatment against persons with learning difficulties (Colella & Bruyere, 2011), it is evident from this study that the stereotyping of persons with learning difficulties regarding certain level of abilities has restricted their opportunities to work together with non-disabled employees in an integrated setting. However, having regular contacts with persons with learning difficulties is promising to provide positive understandings, which could change people's perceptions of the capacities of persons with learning difficulties. Managers, for instance, as described in Chapter 9, confirmed the ability of employees with learning difficulties to work at the same level as non-disabled workers after having direct contact with them (Jenaro *et al.*, 2002).

Moreover, considering this group of employees are among those with moderate level of disability, they were described as being capable of managing their personal activities as well as good at the repetitive kind of jobs. They were also portrayed as fit for simple and trivial jobs, such as folding clothes and stacking goods, which are usually avoided by non-

disabled employees. However, some respondents are still uncertain about the capabilities of persons with learning difficulties in other types of jobs which are non-repetitive. This hesitation was understood by the fact that the employability of particular persons with learning difficulties is perceived to vary according to the degree of impairment. Hence, their (dis)ability was understood not to be generalised but depended on their specific impairments in line with the goal of supported employment to value individual abilities (Wehman *et al.*, 2003).

11.3 SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT IN MALAYSIA

Although the last 10 years have seen major changes in attitudes towards persons with learning difficulties, and this has been reflected in new patterns of service provision, many of the negative beliefs, a lot of buildings and even some caring practices were portrayed by Malaysian researchers to remain as an inheritance of the past (Aina Razlin Mohammad Roose, 2010; Ramakrishnan, 2007; Yeo, 2007). This study confirmed that most of the services provided by both government and non-governmental agencies are assumed to be based on the concept of charity model of disability in terms of institutional care while the provision of rehabilitation service for functional recovery are based on the medical or individual model of disability (see Chapter 8).

However, the welfare approaches to disability based on the social model of disability, which aims to provide direct support for full and equal participation of all persons with disabilities without requiring functional recovery as a

prerequisite, are gradually being implemented. However, such interventions and services are still limited in practice, and the knowledge and experience to develop both systems and services are not sufficiently accumulated.

Development and implementation of concrete services, activities and programmes of this approach are pressing needs to realise the goal of the Biwako Millennium Framework of Action (BMF) and UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) which were ratified by the Malaysian government as illustrated in Chapter 2. In spite of this, persons with learning difficulties are still lagging behind.

It is evident from the findings that persons with learning difficulties have been long neglected and not equally treated in Malaysia as mentioned in Chapter 2. They remain among the most vulnerable members of society and cannot speak up for themselves. Moreover, they are segregated either in secluded institutions or isolated within their families, and discriminated against in almost every area of life (Sperlinger, 1997). They are given very low priority in relation to government services compared to other vulnerable groups or other groups with different impairments. The same goes to their rights to employment by which very limited numbers of this group participate in the labour market. Instead, persons with learning difficulties were reported to usually join sheltered employment offered by the NGOs. However, the last five years could be regarded as opening up a new life for some of them when supported employment was introduced as a further choice to enable them to join more open employment.

It is understood from the literature that supported employment promotes the rights of all individuals to achieve their full potential through the provision of flexible support that enables people to overcome barriers to their employability and access *"real jobs for real pay"*(Wehman *et al.*, 2003: 165). It is based on a concept of self-determination which emphasizes core values such as the right to work, capacity to perform a job, individual strengths, personal goals and choices, and the role of the community in the person's growth and development (Wehman *et al.*, 2003). It is also believed that *"with authentic instruction and reasonable long-term and personalised support"* (Brown *et al.*, 2006:119), persons with learning difficulties could be trained to work in open employment. Findings of the present study affirm that this supported employment, which emphasizes the person's abilities and productivity may also reduce stigma associated with having a disability (Wehman *et al.*, 2003). Moreover, become accustomed with the daily routine has given them a vision to see their future lives with more challenging and exciting tasks to perform and demonstrate their abilities.

The findings of this study indicate, however, that not all groups of people with learning disabilities appear to have comparable access to supported employment. For example, only 30 per cent of the participants of the supported employment scheme in BZ Corporation are female. This may in part, reflect gender differences in the general labour market participation in Malaysia (Schafgans, 2000) with only 46 per cent labour participation rate among women (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2010).

Similarly, the findings on the ethnic backgrounds of the scheme's participants are also important. An ethnicity difference is also noticeable given that 66 per cent of the scheme's participants are Malays compared to 26 per cent are Chinese and only six per cent are Indians (see Table 6.1). It is in fact an astonishing finding as a reverse ethnicity difference could be seen in the first enrolment. This scenario happened because in the first enrolment, the candidates were brought by NGOs and since most of their members are Chinese, only one out of 12 who joined the scheme is Malays (see Chapter 9). The increase of participation among Malays in the next recruitment could be related to the initiatives of the employer to contact special-education schools directly and to interview students with learning difficulties. Since public-education is a very National system, more Malay candidates then entered the scheme, especially those from the Vocational Indahpura School due to direct recruitment activities at the school.

This situation of greater participation among Chinese in the first phase is contradict to other literature which found that there is a difference between ethnicity especially among minority in terms of receiving services because of the discrimination (O'Hara, 2003). Whilst, in Malaysia, though Malays are the majority but in terms of disability issues, their engagement is less compared to the Chinese who are actively involved in NGOs.

11.3.1 The origins and emergence

It is much debated by the NGOs and government officials that supported employment is not a new idea introduced in Malaysia but one which has

been claimed to have been developed and implemented by NGOs from the 1990s. Moreover, the idea of supported employment was also introduced by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to the Malaysian Labour Department (LD) in 1995 but was not taken forward. Only after the initiative of the SWD-JICA project in 2005 which offered specific and direct support, was supported employment cautiously introduced. It is generally understood that supported employment introduced in this project (see Section 8.3.3) is being initiated with the intention to shift the understanding of disability from the medical to social model and also shift the focus of services provided for persons with disabilities from recovery and rehabilitation to supportive participation-oriented provision.

Findings from Chapter 8, 9 and 10 highlighted that though the Malaysian government did not specifically promoting a policy of supported employment; there are several major developments which could be related to the development of supported employment in Malaysia. The *vocational curriculum and transition programme* for instance, were introduced into the education and training system to enhance the competencies of persons with learning difficulties to help them to join the labour market. The *employment services* have provided a general support to all types of impairments though not specifically focusing on persons with learning difficulties. Commitments to reform were made with the specification of definitions for the term of learning difficulties and enhancement of policies on disability. Moreover, with the promotion of self-advocacy awareness, active participation of persons with

learning difficulties in the governmental activities of drafting policies and programme planning were encouraged.

An important reason underlying this movement has been due to the significant change in the way disability is understood. This changed understanding of disability is parallel to the universal transition of understanding from the medical to the social model of disability which was reflected in the BMF and UNCRPD, which promoted full participation of disabled people in all spheres of their societies. Since Malaysia is one of the signatories to these guidelines and/or international conventions, the government, as described by most respondents, attempted to accommodate these differences and give people with disabilities equal opportunities to participate in society. This is shown with the Persons with Disabilities Act passed by the Malaysian parliament in 2008 followed by the National Policy on Persons with Disabilities and National Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities. In addition, with the strong commitment and support from the international organization such as JICA through collaboration in the SWD-JICA project, the Government attended to the application of the policies proposed.

Nationally, NGOs were believed by the officers, managers and coordinators to act as the national forces fighting for the rights of persons with learning difficulties in employment with the spread of self advocacy among the members of learning difficulties. It is apparent that NGOs have played a crucial role in initiating and offering support for the employment of this group

of persons with learning difficulties (see Section 10.3). The survey findings affirm that, other than seeking assistance through networks of family and friends, NGOs have been more regularly contacted to get a job compared to other services provided such as through the Labour Department or Social Welfare Department or other private employment agencies.

Moreover, with the support of training for employment (see Section 10.3.2) and the experience of working in their sheltered employment (see Section 10.3.3), persons with learning difficulties were thought to be ready to join the employee workforce. Besides, NGOs started to search for supported employment opportunities for their members and provided job coaching in their support to secure employment and sustain them (see Section 10.3.5).

The practice of depending on NGOs is obvious especially found among Chinese compared to other ethnic groups of Malay and Indians. However, the importance of NGOs support could be seen to be realised by Malays when they also tend to get in touch with NGOs to get the current job (see Section 6.2.3). In addition to this, membership of persons with learning difficulties in NGOs is also verified by managers and coordinators as representing a significant factor in being introduced to employment with the training required, either through job opportunities in the NGOs themselves or the external world of work through the inspiration of self-advocacy.

Apart from the significant engagement of NGOs, the stability of Malaysia in terms of its political, economic and social systems as mentioned in Section 8.4.1, has undoubtedly been a factor in relation to those improvements in

mainstreaming persons with disabilities into development activities, in general. The fact that Malaysia has already achieved a certain level of economic development and political stability has allowed a shift in priorities and a focus on social issues and systems such as those in the area of disability.

11.3.2 Development and implementation

As regards development and implementation, the supported employment scheme initiated by BZ Corporation is regarded as the first successful one for persons with learning difficulties introduced in Malaysia, this thesis has concentrated specifically on its nature and progress. The initiative of supported employment in the company was started with a small group of participants by which only 12 recipients of supported employment were chosen among those with moderate learning difficulties (see Section 9.3.2). The tendency of selecting people with moderate learning difficulties is generally understood as a simple trial in accepting persons with learning difficulties in the labour market (Beyer & Robinson, 2009). Furthermore, to ensure a thorough monitoring of the scheme, it was placed under the control of one person dealing with recruitment, placement and management of the issues arising within employment. Moreover, a special approach to recruitment and training was provided to allow for the needs of persons with learning difficulties.

In addition, the buddy system and a disabled badge are provided as an assistive support for this group. However, it was reported that the buddy

system was based on supervision relationships; rather than a peer or more senior relationship as mentioned in previous literature (Parmenter, 2010). It was found not to be really effective; supervisors were always busy and employees with learning difficulties were often left alone (see Section 7.3.2). Moreover, there is no systematic approach employed to monitor the employees in supported employment such as shadowing, where the employees will be introduced slowly in stages before being permitted to proceed independently with their routines. Thus, it could be assumed that this version of the buddy system was adopted without specifically referring to the job coaching approach suggested in supported employment programmes.

Some of the scheme's participants refused to wear the disabled employees' identification badge for reasons of pride and dignity. Although the employers saw the need for the disabled badge for the identification and security of the employees, the employee themselves saw it as a humiliation. Parents, on the other hand, expressed their wish to disclose the impairment to the public because they were concerned more about the safety of their sons and daughters. In spite of this, the managers could be seen to be very committed in helping their employees to develop meaningful skills and experience. They have been very responsive to the needs of this group and strongly committed to see the positive impact of the scheme upon them. This applies especially to those who have passion and enthusiasm in the issue of disability through their personal experience with persons with disabilities. Having those experiences in their lives accelerate their understandings of this group.

These findings relating to commitment and personal experience were in agreement with a previous study by Asch (2001).

Nevertheless, perhaps since supported employment is still really at the initial stage in Malaysia, respondents in the study had less to say about the implementation of supported employment. Instead, they focused more on the challenges faced and recommendations for future enhancement, issues to be discussed in the next section.

11.3.3 Challenges

Looking through the findings from the five chapters, the challenges are primarily still directed to the lack of understanding of disability issues either among the government administrators or parents and the public (see Section 8.5, Section 9.5 and Section 10.5). All interviewed respondents pointed to the fact that government administrators have a limited understanding in dealing with the issue of disability. Although there are written regulations and provisions regarding disability, there is minimal observation and inspection of the application of the provisions on the lives of disabled people. It is believed that with comprehensive understandings, better provisions for persons with disabilities could be delivered with the enhancement of the education, employment and welfare systems, and awareness could be spread to the public, employers and disabled persons.

Thus, more collaboration from all parties of governmental disability-related ministries, NGOs and employers was seen by respondents to be desirable so as to bring together the strategic plans for the benefits of persons with

learning difficulties. The challenge in synchronising the responsibilities of disability issues among related agencies should not only be for the MoWFC but should be regarded as a national accountability.

Another challenge relates to the limited participation in volunteering among the Malays community. Looking from ethnic and religious perspectives, it is interesting to note that the three NGOs in the study are all coordinated by Chinese and received funds mostly from the churches and Christian or Buddhist organisations or individuals. In response to the lower participation of Malays in the organisation highlighted by Suzy in Section 10.5.1, it could be seen that UV was particularly the only organisation participated in by Malays compared to the Malaysian CARE and PERKOBP. The main reason why Malay parents refrain from sending their children to Malaysian CARE and PERKOPB seems to stem from religious concerns and the *halal*¹⁸ issue.

11.4 HOW FAR HAVE THEY COME?

Similar to other studies cited in Chapter 4 (e.g. Burge *et al.*, 2007; Jenaro *et al.*, 2002), the supported employment scheme simultaneously improved the image of the company while also having other positive impacts especially solving its problem of high staff turnover. From the employer's perspective, the primary purpose of the scheme is to deal with the turnover problems in the company. Employees with learning difficulties were also portrayed as

¹⁸ Halal foods are foods that are allowed under Islamic dietary guidelines.

loyal and having positive work-attitude. Additionally, the first phase of 12 participants of supported employment in BZ Corporation has given an idea for the company to have a direct contact with special education schools, especially Indahpura School, which provided vocational training for persons with learning difficulties.

Moreover, supported employment has been demonstrated to have a positive impact on financial independence (Brooke *et al.*, 1995), social inclusion (Wistow & Schneider, 2003), quality of life and well-being (Jahoda *et al.*, 2008). In general, the survey findings affirm that the opportunities taken up by persons with learning difficulties to work in supported employment have given them happier lives, especially with more monetary rewards and social inclusion in the community. More than half expressed their happiness working in supported employment in terms of the location which is near to their family home and having interesting work to do (see Section 6.3.1).

It was suggested that monetary reward is the sole basis for persons with learning difficulties to yearn for a job (Rynes *et al.*, 2004). Corresponding to the fact, the findings implied that earning their own money and having an ability to support their future lives has been a key motivator for them.

However, other complementary benefits from an employment also contribute to the importance of work to them. For instance, most felt that achieving a personal income increased their self-worth.

Findings from the interviews with employees with learning difficulties (see Chapter 7) revealed that most of them expressed preferences for supported

employment and enjoyed the challenge of working in supported employment basically because of this element of financial independence because of their earnings. However, although the current job was assumed to offer better conditions and salary when compared to their previous job (where they had had one), respondents indicated their unhappiness with the amount of money earned (see Section 6.3.1) and 91 per cent hoped for a better salary (see Section 6.3.3).

As regards socialising, most persons with learning difficulties are usually limited to the home, taken care of by their parents and have limited exposure to hanging out with others and this resulted in low self-confidence (see Section 10.3.3). The participants in supported employment were generally seen to gain more social benefits as the environment enables them to make friends with individuals without disabilities (but see below), obtain cultural benefits from holding a job since an individual's identity is often shaped by work, and become included to a greater degree in society outside of work (Ohtake & Chadsey-Rusch, 1999). In order to discuss further the experience of inclusion in this supported employment, four dimensions of social integration introduced by Chadsey-Rusch and colleagues (Chadsey-Rusch & Heal, 1995; Chadsey-Rusch *et al.*, 1997) were explored: social participation, workplace acceptance, social support and personal acceptance.

Joining supported employment is generally regarded as part of *social participation* in the community. The data in the study suggest that those in supported employment commonly expressed their satisfaction in the items of

'meeting new people' and 'opportunity to support family'. Nonetheless, this response conflicts somewhat with another response from the survey that shows their dissatisfaction with their social participation when more than 80 per cent hoped for a better social life at work.

In terms of *work acceptance*, the opportunity to create friendships and get along with other employees in the workplace is described to be not fully attained - as mentioned in the literature (Wistow and Schneider, 2003). The treatment and expectations they receive from colleagues or supervisors or even customers are differed to those of non-disabled employees. Persons with learning difficulties in the study stressed the importance of fitting in with their colleagues and being treated in the same way as everyone else but there would appear to be a fine balancing act between treating them as a member of staff while at the same time making allowances for their learning disability.

Moreover, the buddy system was intended to be introduced as part of the *social support* in supported employment. The fact that the buddy system is not operating via the employee-employee relationship but rather through the employee-supervisor connection, may contribute to a lack of social support and peer interaction experienced by some participants at the workplace.

For some, this extended to a feeling of loneliness which could be seen in their daily working lives and reveals the lack of *personal acceptance* among non-disabled employees when having employees with learning difficulties in the workplace. They seldom talk to other employees or supervisors. Most of

the time, they just concentrate on doing their tasks. They also have their break or lunch alone. These findings support the observations of Margalit and Efrati (1996) that loneliness at work is probably one of the negative social implications from supported employment for this very vulnerable group, similar to the problem faced during their school days. This limited interaction, however, could be associated with their personal ability to socialise at the workplace. As stated by Katz and Katz (2002), perhaps for some of them, their social skills were not yet sufficient for integration. Nevertheless, some employees reported being pleased with the acceptance shown by non-disabled employees. A few described having social contact with other non-disabled employees such as having lunch and communicating freely with each other.

In brief, there is evidence from the literature that supported employment has a positive impact on the lives of persons with learning difficulties in terms of integration within the community (*Bass et al.*, 1996; *Drake et al.*, 1994) and a better chance to live more independently with their own income (*Jenaro et al.*, 2002). In spite of this, the situation described by employees with learning difficulties in this study indicates the limited control they have over their own lives.

In conclusion, although employees with learning difficulties valued the social opportunities that supported employment brought, the opportunities for social inclusion were debatable. Whilst working within the mainstream settings, the employees were still being segregated from other non-disabled employees in

the social activities as demonstrated by a number of studies by which persons with learning difficulties are not as well integrated in the open employment setting as expected (Fabian *et al.*, 1993; Wistow & Schneider, 2003). In some cases, they were likely to socialise only with other disabled workers who share similar disabilities.

11.4.1 How much choice did persons with learning difficulties have about entering the open labour market?

Concentrating on the lived experience of employees with learning difficulties (see Chapter 7), the situation described provides a diversity of views and experience, which correspond with the literature indicating the limitation of control they have of their own lives. Most respondents demonstrated limited choice in their decision to work and also limited freedom in participating in their selection and recruitment process. The majority reported that they were introduced and suggested by their teacher at school or by a trainer at the training centre or sheltered workshop. This means that the decision of whether they are ready to work or not is not truly theirs but mainly the teachers or trainers' decision. Some also reported that they remained working because of their parents. Few described a freedom of choice by which they applied for the job by their own initiatives either through the related agencies or close friends (see Section 7.3.1).

In addition, most positions allocated to them are specified to sales assistants relying on the general assumption that repetitive job are the most suitable for most persons with learning difficulties (Bond *et al.*, 1997; Brown *et al.*, 2006)

since it is assumed that they possess only lower skills included fewer communicative skills (see Section 6.2.4). Moreover, much of the work that they did, tended to be behind-the-scene work involving tidying up stock rooms, sorting out deliveries, stacking goods and cleaning (Banks *et al.*, 2010). This was not what many young people were expecting when they began working as indicated in their discussions of their hopes to have more challenging work in future (see Section 6.3.3).

Moreover, although the employees are encouraged to express their preferences and interests, it would appear that the wishes of the employees were not always taken into consideration when placing them in a job. This is seen to contradict to the importance of matching clients with jobs that they want to do and are interested in which is stressed in the literature on supported employment (Siegel *et al.*, 1991; Schneider, 1998; Meuser *et al.*, 2001; Wilson, 2003). This lack of choice shows the restriction in the definition of empowerment, which concentrates on the employability as claimed by Galster and colleagues (Galster *et al.*, 2009) in their Swiss study that supported employment is not a universal remedy for enhancing all recipients' abilities as they have no freedom in the decision-making process.

11.5 CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Given the nature of the research, it was generally argued that the mixed methods of quantitative and qualitative employed using questionnaires and interviews, in group and by individual, were absolutely appropriate. Different data sets were analysed made it possible to triangulate the findings gathered

to enhance the credibility and validity of the research. In spite of this, three main elements of the research process were reflected; the participation of the respondents, the process of selection and the analysis process.

11.5.1 Persons with learning difficulties act as the focal subject of the research

As has been mentioned throughout, one of the major aims of the research was to explore the experiences of persons with learning difficulties in supported employment. Thus, ensuring that they were at the centre of the research is a main component of the research. In order to do this, efforts were made as far as possible to present the work experiences of persons with learning difficulties in supported employment as perceived by them. The methods selected offered a reasonable mechanism for doing this.

It has been attempted to ensure that the research process was a participatory for the research participants and the research itself was conducted in partnership with a research advisory group who themselves had learning difficulties. This helped to ensure that the decision made regarding the methodology suit with the nature and well-being of persons with learning difficulties. Overall, working with the research advisors was a positive experience and the research generally benefited from their input. Of particular importance was their assistance in terms of designing and piloting the questionnaires and the interview schedules in order to ensure they were relevant to the lives of persons with learning difficulties.

Surveys completed by employees with learning difficulties permit the researcher to understand the general perceptions of the recipients while the in-depth interviews with them allowed broadening the scope to salient issues related to their experiences. Although the interview schedule was semi-structured in nature, there was sufficient scope to allow persons with learning difficulties to choose the issues to discuss. In-depth interviews with other individuals and groups who have significant participation in the supported employment scheme additionally offer the discussion from different perspectives. In addition, during the analysis of data and the writing up of the research, attempts were made to construct the world as perceived by individuals as far as possible.

11.5.2 Impact of gatekeepers on participants recruited

Upon reflection, the nature of the research participants and the methods adopted resulted in some challenges in terms of getting full feedback from them. It is worth re-emphasising the impact that the management of the company has in the recruitment process of participants of the study. Having facilitated by the company in administering the survey resulted low responses and feedback from the employees with learning difficulties. Out of 82 employees with learning difficulties targeted, only 57 questionnaires received back. Furthermore, the sample of employees with learning difficulties for group interviews was ideally planned to be selected based on the survey conducted. However, facing the reluctance from the company to give access to all outlets, participants were finally recruited only from few

outlets from central zone and one outlet from south zone with assistance from the Human Resource Offices of BZ Corporation who controls the supported employment scheme in the company (Section 5.3.4). Having such restrictions finally influence the scope of participation and therefore limit the broad of investigation.

11.6 CONCLUSIONS

Focusing on the lived experience of individuals with learning difficulties, recognising the diversity of views and experiences among them, it can be seen that regardless of the level of disability, they are willing and able to work provided that they are given the opportunity and training to do so effectively. It should be noted that monetary reward is not regarded as the basic motivation and certainly not the only reason for wanting a job. Equally important are the prospects that working in an open environment might have for their inclusion and freedom with respect to their social lives.

The overriding finding in this study revealed that even though most persons with learning difficulties believe themselves to have the ability to work in supported employment, others who are providing support for their entry to the workforce still have doubts. Moreover, even though they enjoy many aspects of their working lives in supported employment; they still face difficulties in developing interpersonal relationships in the workplace and achieving the degree of independence that is often assumed to result from having a job (Vaughn & Hogan, 1994).

In conclusion, it is clear that supported employment schemes have given persons with learning difficulties opportunities to work in an open environment and receive more income. Yet their deeper experiences at work are more or less the same as before and their capacities for taking much better control of their own lives have yet to be realised. Further development of policy and practice is required, taking greater account of the research evidence from a variety of contexts (Wehman, 2006) which points to the potential contributions that persons with learning difficulties can make to economic and social activities at the same time as leading more meaningful lives.

CHAPTER 12

CONCLUSIONS

12.1 INTRODUCTION

There has been little research on exploring supported employment practices for persons with learning difficulties and offering empirical findings from real employment experiences. Although there are studies completed in the minority world, little effort has been made to investigate the practice of supported employment in the majority world, especially where a country is designing policy for the first time and is at the early stages of implementation. This phase of policy development involves connecting with the views of employers and employees, as well as with those supporting the scheme from the government and non-government agencies. For Malaysia, although there has been a policy on encouraging the economic participation of persons with disabilities, little attention has been paid to persons with learning difficulties. Thus, this thesis has aimed to fill this gap through providing some substantial evidence.

This final chapter of the thesis presents some broad conclusions that have emerged from a study which represents the first attempt to explore the supported employment scheme initiated in Malaysia for persons with learning difficulties. Sections are devoted successively to drawing out the implications of the research for policy, practice and future research, ending with a section on concluding reflections.

12.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

A number of policy implications emerge from this study which suggests the need for rethinking the practice in Malaysia's employment support for persons with learning difficulties. This recommended policy will mean additional resources and make the case that if the ministry funds such costs, even the expense of other considerations; a high quality supported employment scheme can be introduced in every sector of businesses with consequent benefit to persons with learning difficulties as a whole.

12.2.1 Enrich the understanding on disability issues

Principally, the transition from medical to social model of disability which translated into the policies and services provided by the government could be seen to mirror the expansion of social model of disability around the world. However, the data showed the limited awareness and knowledge about disability issues particularly persons with learning difficulties and their employability among most government officers, managers and NGOs coordinators. Hence, efforts must be made to continue the national programme in relation to disability equality awareness across the board to ensure the spread of disability understanding among the public and the stakeholders. The understanding should be incorporated with the cultural factors by which to understand how disability and learning difficulties is perceived in a particular environment as it will impact the policy decisions.

On the other hand the study also stressed on the doubt and suspicion among the public on the employability of persons with leaning difficulties especially

the low perception among employers, similar findings to previous literature (Purvis *et al.*, 2006; Stevens, 2002; Wehbi & El-Lahib, 2007). Thus, employers could be given more awareness of the capability and employability of persons with learning difficulties as well as advantages of employing this group to enhance their willingness to open employment opportunities for persons with learning difficulties.

More importantly, the understanding of the concept of supported employment and the benefits of this support in relation to persons with learning difficulties' employment seemed to be severely lacking. It is essential for all to have an extensive knowledge of supported employment regarding the support needed to link with the need of persons with learning difficulties. The government officers, especially, should be made aware that persons with learning difficulties have different level of capabilities and that the efforts are crucial in providing a suitable support to meet their needs. Provision focused on equipping them with a variety of skills and competencies should be also emphasized to prepare them to be a dedicated support staff of supported employment.

12.2.2 Acknowledge the perspectives of persons with learning difficulties

While supported employment seems to meet the needs of the participants for some kind of work in an open organizational setting, it does not meet the needs of persons with learning difficulties to become fully socialised into the labour market. Thus, another important implication of this study is that the

voices and views of persons with learning difficulties can provide information about their own feelings reflecting on their experiences. It is apparent that persons with learning difficulties are lagged behind in terms of engaging with government in providing their views and perspectives to benefit their group. Therefore, their perspectives about their employment experience in the study should be taken seriously and given consideration by the policy-makers in reviewing the employment support services provided. This implies the need to enhance the involvement of all stakeholders including persons with learning difficulties and their organizations in setting priorities for disability-related reform and taking an active part in its implementation.

12.2.3 Upgrade the education and training system for persons with learning difficulties

This thesis also identified gaps in and between the education and training systems and the transition to employment, which prompted the need of filling or bridging the gaps. It is apparent from the study that there are substantial barriers faced by persons with learning difficulties in attaining their basic rights including the rights to education and rights to work. The widespread stigma and prejudices from the public with regard to their abilities contribute to discrimination in relation to their rights to education and employment. Access to adequate education is important in securing meaningful employment and avoiding lifelong dependency, poverty and social exclusion. This suggests the need to emphasise the specific responses required in

relation to education and training reform if employment chances are to be increased.

12.2.4 Intensify the government departmental collaboration

Moreover, results from this study may prove useful for the government of Malaysia, especially the Ministry of Human Resource, in developing policies and designing programmes relating to employment for persons with learning difficulties. This is in anticipation of the future role of the Ministry whereby there is a need to bring in more cross government departmental collaboration for smart partnership to work together in building the capacity of providing support services for persons with learning difficulties. This implies that the task of establishing a system of sustaining the employment of persons with learning difficulties requires planning involving the Labour Department, Social Welfare Department and Development for People with Disabilities Department as well as NGOs, employers and persons with learning difficulties.

12.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

There are several implications that could be considered by the major stakeholders regarding promoting the participation of persons with learning difficulties in employment.

12.3.1 Develop the supported employment policy and practice

Findings from this study showed that the respondents were in agreement about the significant role of supported employment in encouraging the

participation of persons with learning difficulties in the labour market and ensuring their sustainable employment. Moreover, the positive implications could be seen not only for those participated in the scheme but also for the employer and the employment scenario. It appears that a crucial element emerged from this study is the need to evaluate the current employment services offered for persons with learning difficulties. In particular areas for upgrading what is needed is an emerging and developing clear written policy of a supported employment scheme which would include: job preparation, job development, job placement, job training, follow up and follow along services and promotion and service evaluation.

Moreover, this study addressed practical issues in the current practice of supported employment in BZ Corporation. Findings from this study can provide some guidance to other employers seeking to assist persons with learning difficulties to reach their full potential. BZ Corporation did use some employment strategies that provided enrichment and extension for persons with learning difficulties. Starting small, having a single point of control of one person dealing with recruitment, placement and management of the issues arising within employment, providing fair policy in the recruitment and placement, and offering assistive policies and support were among the strategies used by the managers. Moreover, special employment training is provided for them to cater for their level of abilities. The result of the study add to the knowledge contributed to the literature on supported employment, though the practicality of the practices could be contested depending on the

capacity of persons with learning difficulties and the culture of the workplace environment.

12.3.2 Consider the situation of the employers

The findings confirmed research by Kregel (1999) which testified that persons with learning difficulties are able to become productive and contributing members of the labour force. Employees with learning difficulties are described as hardworking and loyal which adds great value to the company and results in a lower turnover rate of employees in the retail industry which typically has high turnover rate. This implies that persons with learning difficulties are of economic value and give the company a competitive edge because of their loyalty and trustworthiness which reduces the turnover rate of employees and lowers the cost of training new employees to work in the long term.

Realizing this significance, it is vital that the employers' readiness to employ persons with learning difficulties is considered in terms of both perceptions and practicalities. These employers must be convinced that persons with learning difficulties deserve a chance to develop their own individual and specific talents. However, employers cannot be expected to accept persons with learning difficulties without confirming their potential to benefit the employers. Moreover, suitable measures should be deliberated for the employers to form a positive workplace culture by creating a supportive and interactive work setting between employees with and without disabilities to assist the job retention process.

12.3.3 Enhance the efficacy of local employment or training services

Findings of this study and previous literature (Bass *et al.*, 1996; Beyer & Robinson, 2009; Drake *et al.*, 1994; Novak *et al.*, 2011; Shearn *et al.*, 2000) demonstrate substantial prospects placed on the supported employment programme in determining better employment prospects and the social inclusion of this group in the community. However, in the route of achieving the intended plan and upholding the success rate of participation, the psychological aspects of persons with learning difficulties who have their own restrictions and dilemma need to be taken into account.

Relating the degree of participation among persons with learning difficulties in the labour market to the incentives of double tax deductions offered by the Government for companies which employ persons with disabilities, it is well understood that the number is not as great as hoped. It is therefore understood that support services are also necessary to assist employers in hiring persons with learning difficulties. This suggests an urgent need for a specifically designed supported employment programme in which special support could be offered to persons with learning difficulties before and after the employment.

In this study, the retail industries seem to be suitable for persons with learning difficulties through the offer of employment mostly as sales assistants whose main duties involves arranging products for display on the shelves, pasting price labels, receiving stock from storeroom. Seeing the description of tasks which involved repetitive tasks, this findings challenge on

the replicability of this form of supported employment in other forms of business such as manufacturing or office administration which involves a more straightforward manual skills. This implies that the Government needs to extend the evidence base by replicating to other areas of employment to see the suitability in addressing their needs and matching their abilities. This also implies the need of training in building competent and efficient government officers who provide workplace support and disability awareness.

Moreover, the findings of the study affirm the appropriateness of participation only for people with a certain level of impairment. In other studies, those who are less impaired (McGaughey *et al.*, 1995; West *et al.*, 1992) were found to be able to participate. Therefore, speculating on these findings, the scheme should be challenged in terms of its extendability to more people with different degrees of learning difficulties, probably those with severe to intermediate to maintain the thrust of supported employment, rather than concentrating on a group that has been seen as easier to place. However, since supported employment is in its early days in Malaysia, it might be seen as appropriate to undertake a pilot project in mainstreaming the programme for extending opportunities to those whose degree of impairment has traditionally meant that they have been regarded as more challenging in relation to employment.

12.3.4 Reflect on approaches to addressing the differential labour market in terms of gender and ethnicity

The data shows an imbalance in the number of participants in the supported employment scheme as far as gender and ethnicity are concerned. Male employees are seen to be the majority while Malay employees dominate other ethnic groups of Chinese and Indians.

The findings showed the improvement in the degree of participation among Malay employees as compared to the first phase since the employers had direct access to schools rather than relying solely on the NGOs. This implies the need to reflect on approaches to address these differences of gender and ethnicity in the labour market participation. An effective recruitment strategy, for instance, should be intensified taking into account their particular pathways and barriers to employment.

12.4 FURTHER RESEARCH

As mentioned above, this study marks only the beginning of research of its kind in Malaysia and covers only a single case through which to examine issues relating to supported employment in the country. Larger- scale research could be undertaken to compare findings and gain a deeper understanding of the complex issues of providing support for persons with learning difficulties to participate in the open labour market. It is with this in mind that the following investigations are recommended to those who are interested in enriching knowledge about supported employment in Malaysian settings:

(a) Replication of the research but concentrating on other sectors

Whilst supported employment has not been formally fully implemented even in the BZ Corporation, it would be worth studying its introduction into other companies' forms of work and different sectors. So that it is possible to assess from a range of cases whether or not similar issues arise in different settings and what factors are major determinants of success in implementation.

(b) An exploration of the effectiveness of supported employment scheme implemented in certain company.

Clearly, the effectiveness of a certain scheme is reflected in its sustainability which will be influenced by several factors, including the costs and benefits experienced by the organization. Therefore, it would be useful to examine the financial and non-financial implications of participating in a supported employment scheme from the organisational perspective.

(c) A consideration of parental perspectives on supported employment.

Parental voice is another issue which is under development in the Malaysian context. Parents who have young adults with learning difficulties are in a position to give more perspective on the experiences and changes in their sons and daughters which they observe through involvement in supported employment.

(d) A consideration of the sustainability of employees with learning difficulties in an employment

The retention of jobs among employees with learning difficulties makes a potentially considerable difference to the opportunities for training, development and advancement. Thus, a study of the attitudes of employees with learning difficulties to changing jobs and moving in to and out of employment, even the labour force, would provide insights about the dynamics of employment relevant to the design of social policy.

(e) The development of Malaysian NGOs

Whilst employer direct engagement with schools is to be encouraged, the need for this in the context of increasing the participation of members of the Malay community with learning difficulties in supported employment seems partly to have been a consequence of the lack of Malay NGO activity in this area. It would be helpful to understand better the reasons for this and the scope for increasing the level of activity in future.

12.5 CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

There is a lack of understanding about people with learning difficulties among parents and the public, especially among the Malay community. For those with learning difficulties, this limits their own awareness of their rights as well as that of others. Despite Malays being the majority of the Malaysian population, most NGOs for persons with learning difficulties have been set up and supported by the Chinese community. The researcher believes that there is a need for Muslims living in the Malay culture as well as experiencing a multi-cultural society to understand better the Islamic values based on the Quran and Hadith, and look at how this integrates with culture. As discussed

in Chapter 3, Islam provides useful reflections on how to theorise disability. According to the belief of equality, a disabled person in the eyes of Allah is equivalent to a non-disabled person. Disabled people are in a minority but should not be oppressed.

The review of previous literature, and the exploration of the current practices of supported employment in Malaysia and internationally have provided me with valuable knowledge relating to supported employment, its provision, key elements and principal impacts. The real world of supported employment is complicated and there are constraints that cannot be ignored. Nevertheless, that should not stop the Government from trying to refine present employment services in offering information, advice and guidance to job seekers and potential recruiters plus a 'matching jobs to people' service more effectively for persons with learning difficulties.

The completion of the empirical study in a single company in Malaysia has helped me to identify aspects that could be enhanced and transformed to suit better the Malaysian culture and its values. This study reviews the factors behind the emergence and development of supported employment in the country. The main aim of the study was to shed light on supported employment practices in Malaysia so as to understand its impacts on the lives of persons with learning difficulties. It is hoped that by completing this study, the awareness of supported employment can be raised in Malaysia and inspire educationalists and policy makers to think further about the

development of national policy and programmes for the betterment of employment services for persons with learning difficulties.

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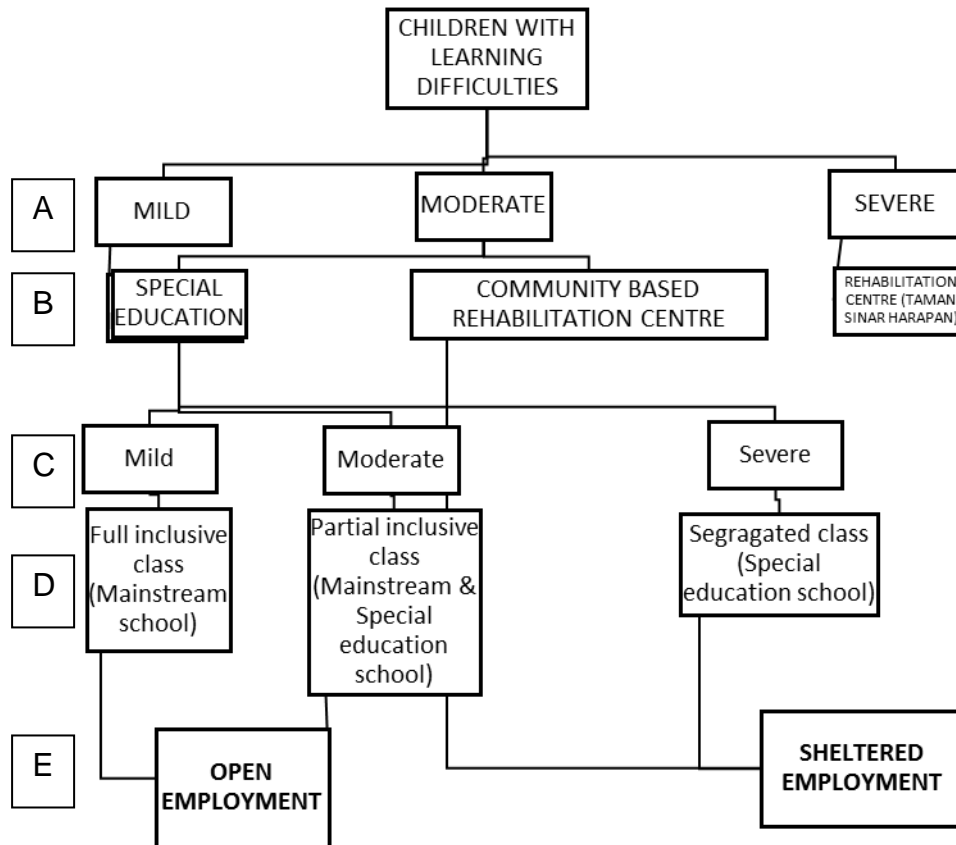
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Appendix 2.2

FLOW OF EDUCATION FOR PERSONS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES



A.Categories defined by medical practitioner

B. Placement made based on level of difficulties

C.Categorised defined by teachers

D.Placement made based on the categories

E.Types of employment

Appendix 5.1
QUESTIONNAIRE

FOR EMPLOYEES WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES
IN GCH RETAILS SDN BHD

My name is Wan Arnidawati Wan Abdullah and I am now studying in University of Warwick, United Kingdom. My research is about employment for persons with learning difficulties in Malaysia. GCH RETAILS SDN BHD is one of the organisations which employ a big number of employees with learning difficulties. For that reason, you have been chosen to help in this research with all other employees with learning difficulties in this organisation who will answer this questionnaire.

I would like to know about your background and your job experience in GCH RETAILS SDN BHD. It will only take fifteen minutes to answer this questionnaire. Your information is essential to help the government in planning a better employment service system for persons with learning difficulties in Malaysia.

Your cooperation in answering this questionnaire is highly appreciated. I will not use your name in my report writing, so that nobody will know what you tell me. Answering the questionnaire will not affect your job or any benefits you get. I will let you know the summary of the research findings if you are interested to know.

If you have any questions, please contact me via my email address: W.A.Wan-Abdullah@warwick.ac.uk or my phone number: _____

Thank you for your help with this important survey.

YOUR COOPERATION IS HIGHLY APPRECIATED

Sincerely,

Wan Arnidawati Wan Abdullah

Institute for Employment Research

University of Warwick,

United Kingdom

HOW TO FILL IN THE QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire consists of three parts:

PART A : BACKGROUND INFORMATION

PART B : EMPLOYMENT WITH GCH RETAILS SDN BHD

PART C : VIEWS ON EMPLOYMENT

Please tick the appropriate boxes and write the appropriate responses when you are asked to specify.

Some people will like to have some help to fill in the questionnaire. This is fine, but it is YOUR answers to the questions that we need.

After answering all questions, please put the questionnaire in envelope provided and submit to your supervisor.

PART A: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A1. Gender

- Male Female

A2. Ethnic group

- Malay Indian
 Chinese Others, please specify:

A3. Age group

- 16-20 years 31-35 years
 21-25 years 36-40 years
 26-30 years Others, please specify:

A4. Marital status

- Single Widowed
 Married Divorced

A5. Thinking about your own personal development, please tick any boxes which describe your difficulties in doing the daily routines?

- Mobility or moving around
 Ability to lift, carry or move objects
 Manual dexterity (using your hands to carry out everyday tasks)
 Communication (speech, hearing or eyesight) or interaction with people
 Memory or ability to concentrate, learn or understand
 Physical co-ordination
 Other health problem or disability
(Please describe: _____)

A6. Do these difficulties or disability affect the amount or type of work you can do?

- Yes No

A7. Did you ever go to school?

Yes

No

A7.1. If Yes, what is your highest educational qualifications?

Pre-school

Primary School (Year ____)

Mid Secondary School (Form ____)

Higher Secondary School (Form ____)

Others, please specify:

A8. Did you ever go to skill training centre?

Yes

No

A8.1. If Yes, please state the name of the skill training centre.

A9. Please tick any box which describes your language skills.

1. Malay

Reading

Writing

2. Chinese

Reading

Writing

3. Indian

Reading

Writing

4. English

Reading

Writing

5. Others

Reading

Writing

Please specify: _____

A10. Before you join this organization, did you ever have a job in any organisation (including sheltered workshop)?

No, I never had a job

Yes, I had a job in the past, but was mainly unemployed

Yes, I had a job but want to try a new job in this organisation

--If Yes, please answer questions A10.1.
A10.1. Please state your previous work.

Position Name of Organisation Date of Start Date of End

eg. Sales Assistant XYZ Sdn Bhd June 2005 Dec 2007

eg. Card Maker United Voice May 2008 July 2008

A11. Before you got your present job, did you try any other ways to get a job?
(You can tick (✓) more than one).

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| 1. through Labour Department | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. through Social Welfare Department | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. through private employment agencies | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. through any organisations for disabled people | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. following up job adverts in newspapers | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. through contact with family or friends | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. other sources
(please specify: _____) | <input type="checkbox"/> |

A12. Can you tell me about where do you live at home?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Live with my family | <input type="checkbox"/> Live alone |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Live with my friends | <input type="checkbox"/> Live in sheltered home |

A13. What are or were the occupations of your parents?

i. Father: _____

ii. Mother: _____

A14. Are your parents employed or self-employed?

i. Father: employed self-employed Not working

ii. Mother: employed self-employed Not working

A15. Are you a member of any organizations for disabled person?

Yes

No

A14.1.If Yes, please specify the organization name and your position:

Name of organization **Position**

A16. Do you receive Disabled Employee Allowance from Social Welfare Department?

Yes

No

PART B: EMPLOYMENT IN GCH RETAILS SDN BHD

B1. Please specify your workplace.

Unit/ Department: _____

Branch/ Outlet Name: _____

Town: _____

B2. Employment status

Full time Part time

B3. Do you work shifts?

Yes No

B3.1.If Yes, please specify your shift time:

10.00 am to 3.00 pm 11.00 am to 6.00 pm

Others, please specify: _____

B3.2.If No, please specify your working hours:

9.00 am to 5.00 pm 10.00 am to 6.00 pm

Others, please specify: _____

B4. Your monthly salary (before deductions)?

RM500-RM750 RM1001-RM1250

RM751-RM1000 RM1251-RM1500

Others, please specify: _____

B5. How long have you been with this organisation?

Less than 6 months 19-24 months

6 - 12 months 25-30 months

13-18 months More than 30 months

B6. Position

- Receptionist Cashier
- Sales Assistant Customer Service Assistant
- Store Assistant
- Others, please specify:

B7. Please describe as fully as possible your duties or nature of job. (eg. stacking goods on the rack, sorting clothes, answering calls)

B8. Do any other people at work do the same thing as you?

- Yes No

B9. Do you do the same thing every day of the week at work?

- Yes No

B10. Do you supervise any other people at work?

- Yes No

B11. Have you ever been transferred to different unit or department and do different tasks?

- Yes No

B12. How far is your house to your workplace?

- Less than 2.0 km 10.1-15 km
- 2-5 km More than 15 km
- 5.1-10 km

B13. How do you commute to work?
(You can tick (✓) more than one).

- by public transport (eg. bus, train)
- by motorcycle/ bicycle
- by car
- walking
- Others, please specify: _____

B14. With whom do you go to work?
(You can tick (✓) more than one).

- Alone
- With parents/ family
- With friends
- Others, please specify: _____

B15. How do you know about the vacancy in this organisation?
(You can tick (✓) more than one).

- 1.From Labour Department
- 2.From Social Welfare Department
- 3.From Private Employment Agencies
- 4.From organisation for disabled people
- 5.From job adverts in the newspaper
- 6.From family or friends
- 7. Others, please specify: _____

PART C: VIEWS ON EMPLOYMENT

For this part, please tick any box which indicates your feeling on the statement given.

C1. We want to know about your feelings about any previous jobs you had before this one. Please only answer if you have had another job before.

How do you feel about:		Very Happy	Happy	OK	Unhappy	Very Unhappy
1	The building and rooms you work in					
2	The equipment you use at work					
3	Where your workplace is					
4	The amount of money you earn					
5	Your ability to do your work on time					
6	Your ability to do your work as required					
7	How interesting your work is					
8	Support you get from your supervisor					
9	Support you get from other workers					
10	Sharing ideas with other workers and supervisor					
11	How you get along with people					
12	How you are treated by other people					
13	Your motivation to go to work					
14	Training for additional skills you get at work					
15	Qualifications you can get in the workplace					
16	Extra skills you can get at work					

C2.We want to know your feeling about your current employment.

How do you feel about:		Very Happy	Happy	OK	Unhappy	Very Unhappy
1	The building and rooms you work in					
2	The equipment you use at work					
3	Where your workplace is					
4	The amount of money you earn					
5	Your ability to do your work on time					
6	Your ability to do your work as required					
7	How interesting your work is					
8	Support you get from your supervisor					
9	Support you get from other workers					
10	Sharing ideas with other workers and supervisor					
11	How you get along with people					
12	How you are treated by other people					
13	Your motivation to go to work					
14	Training for additional skills you get at work					
15	Qualifications you can get in the workplace					
16	Extra skills you can get at work					

C3.We want to know how you feel more broadly about your work.

How do you feel about		Very Happy	Happy	OK	Unhappy	Very Unhappy
1.	Earning your own money					
2.	having the opportunity to support my family					
3.	having something to do everyday					
4.	having a structured and scheduled daily life					
5.	the support you get from family and friends in relation to the job					
6.	meeting new people in the workplace					
7.	the recognition you received from your supervisor about your ability					
8.	the recognition you received from other work colleagues about your ability					
9.	your confidence level					

C4.We want to know what your hopes are for the future.

In future, I would like to		Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	keep doing my present job					
2.	have more variety in my work					
3.	have the opportunity to work in other department					
4.	have more challenging works					
5.	have more responsibility					
6.	have a better social life at work					
7.	be paid more money					
8.	stay with my current employer					
9.	have my own business					

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION

Dear Participants,

Thank you very much for taking part in this survey. If you would like to have a summary report, please give your contact details in the spaces below:

Name: _____
Telephone no : _____
Email address: _____
Home address : _____

If you would be willing to participate in an interview or focus group, please give your contact details in the spaces below (unless already provided above):

Name: _____
Telephone no: _____
Email address: _____
Home address: _____

Sincerely,

Wan Arnidawati Wan Abdullah
University of Warwick.

Appendix 5.2

CONSENT FORM

PROJECT TITLE:

Integrated employment: The case of persons with learning difficulties in Malaysia.

RESEARCHER: Wan Arnidawati binti Wan Abdullah

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet overleaf for the above project which I may keep for my records and have the opportunity to ask any questions I may have.

Saya mengesahkan yang saya telah membaca dan memahami maklumat yang telah diberikan mengenai projek yang dimaksudkan di atas. Saya akan menyimpan maklumat tersebut dan mempunyai peluang untuk mendapatkan maklumat tambahan mengenainya.

I agree to take part in the above study and I am willing to be involved in the discussion recorded.

Saya bersetuju untuk mengambil bahagian dalam kajian tersebut dan setuju untuk terlibat dalam perbincangan yang akan direkodkan.

I understand that my information will be held and processed for the following purposes:

Saya faham bahawa maklumat yang diberikan akan digunakan untuk tujuan berikut:

- To be used anonymously for internal publication for a PhD thesis and to be submitted for official assessment and to be drawn on for publication in academic journals or conferences.

Untuk digunakan tanpa menggunakan identity responden sebenar untuk terbitan dalaman dalam bentuk tesis PhD dan penilaian Universiti serta digunakan untuk diterbitkan dalam jurnal akademik atau persidangan.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason for this, without being penalised, and without being harmed in any way.

Saya faham bahawa penyertaan saya dalam kajian ini adalah secara sukarela dan saya bebas untuk menarik diri pada bila-bila masa tanpa memberikan apa-apa sebab, tanpa sebarang denda atau menerima akibat yang buruk dalam apa cara sekalipun.

Name of Participant _____
Nama Responden _____

Wan Arnidawati Wan Abdullah _____

Researcher _____
Penyelidik _____

Appendix 5.3

GROUP INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

GROUP INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR EMPLOYEES WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

Research Question 1: To what extent persons with learning difficulties were capable to join the integrated employment?

- Did you work before joining Giant? Do you think it is difficult for you to get a job?
- Do you attend any training center before joining Giant? What form of training and where? Do you like the training?
- How do you get to work here? Is there any minimum requirement to get a job here?
- Do you still live with your family?
- How do you go to work?
- How do you manage your daily lives? [Prompt: going to and from work, salary management, shopping, social lives]
- What do you do every day? Could you please describe your job scope?

Research Question 3: How has integrated employment for persons with learning difficulties been implemented?

- How do you feel when you were offered this job?
- Do you think that people believe in you and confident that you can do the job?
- Please describe what you have gone through in the selection and recruitment process in detail.
- Can you share your experience on the first day you work here?
- How is your relationship and social interaction with your colleagues? What are among positive/ negative experience you have had?
- What are the perceptions of your friends on your current job?
- Do you like your current job? Why?
- Did the employer asked you what type of job you like most or which department you prefer?
- What attracted you to the position given?
- What do you like about your current job? And are there any aspects of it that you don't like?
- Do you ever have to work outside your working hours? Or what we called overtime job?
- Do you think you need any help to handle the job? How?
- Can you tell us what kinds of help are given to you within organisation?
- Do you have job rotation which varies week to week or month to month? Or you just do the same job?
- Do you think you are suit with the job you are doing now? Maybe you should be given different tasks in different department?
- What is the type of jobs most suitable with you?
- If you were to be offered an exciting career opportunity, or a much better job in another location, would you be prepared to move home in order to take it? Why or why not?

Research Question 4: How has integrated employment affected the lives of persons with learning difficulties socially and economically?

- How do you think this integrated employment has developed and improved your personal development? (follow up) Do you have any examples?
- In what ways has this integrated employment added to your quality of life?
- Do you feel any difference before and after having a full time paid job? [Prompt: more confidence]
- What are your hopes from the company?
- What are your hopes for this integrated employment for persons with learning difficulties?
- What you don't like about working here? What should be done?
- What kind of job and work situation do you want in the future?
- How do you see your career progress from the current job? [Probe: In both short and long term? Within this organisation?

Appendix 7.1

EXAMPLE OF GROUP INTERVIEWS ANALYSIS

THEME: SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

SUB-THEME: SOCIAL INTERACTION

Code: Social interaction with supervisor	
Chee	<p>“Saya jarang cakap dengan supervisor. Kalau saya tak tahu pasal apa-apa, saya akan Tanya dia”</p> <p><i>I rarely talk with my supervisor. Only if I am confused about doing something, I ask him</i></p>
Iskandar	<p>“Saya baik dengan boss dan kawan-kawan. Kadang-kadang cakap pasal bola jugak”</p> <p><i>I have good relations with my boss and colleagues.. Sometimes chatting about football..</i></p>
Code: Good interaction with others	
Alif	<p>“saya tak ada masalah..lagi-lagi dengan supervisor.. saya suka kawan dengan dia.. dia baik.. saya suka dia”</p> <p><i>I don't have any problem.. Especially with my supervisor. I like to be friend with my supervisor.. He's so kind..I like him.</i></p>
Chia	<p>“saya tak ada masalah dengan kawan kat sini”</p> <p><i>I don't have any problem with my friends</i></p>
Liew	<p>“saya tak ada masalah dengan sesiapa”</p> <p><i>I don't have any problem with my friend</i></p>
Mary	<p>“ saya suka kerja sini... ada ramai kawan.. sebab tu sayasuka... tak nak berhenti”</p> <p><i>I like working here. I have many friends. That is why I like working here. I do not want to quit</i></p>
Code: No interaction with others	
Mary	<p>“saya tak cakap banyak dengansapa-sapa.. sibuk.. kalau saya cakap.. mana nak siap kerja”</p> <p><i>I don't talk much with other employees. I am so busy with my work. If I talk with them, I can't finish my job</i></p>
Code: Rejected by some group	

Jo	<p>“saya ada ramai kawan. Pagi saya makan dengan cashiers. Perempuan. Mereka suruh saya ikut mereka sebab mereka tahu apa makanan bagus untuk saya. Tengahari, saya pergi dengan groceries. Tapi selalu dengan perempuan saja.. kawan laki tak nak pergi dengan saya.. saya tak mau peduli”</p> <p><i>I have many friends. In the morning, I will have my breakfast with the cashiers. Ladies. They asked me to follow them as they know what the best food for me. In the afternoon, I go with groceries [sales assistants]. But always be friend with ladies only. If the guys don't want to go with me, I don't care</i></p>
Jo	<p>“selalu diorang cakap kami (orang kurang upaya) buat kerja lembab. Mereka lagi bagus. Tapi dapat gaji sama. Dulu memang kami slow. Tapi sekarang dah pandai. Apa masalahnya?”</p> <p><i>Some people said we (disabled employees) are slow in doing our job. They do better job. But we get the same salary. We are slow in the past. But now we are efficient. What's wrong with that?</i></p>
Lunar	<p>“semua staff selalu buli, main-main staff orang kurang upaya. Tapi saya taulah.. Cuma gurau-gurau sahaja”</p> <p><i>The company staffs always tease disabled employees. Sometimes they bullied us. But I believe, they are just joking</i></p>
Siva	<p>“saya pernah dihalau keluar oleh supervisor. Dia selalu marah-marah. Dia kata saya tak boleh buat kerja. Saya dah buat kerja saya. OK saja. Saya tak tau apa salah saya. Tapi saya fikir dia tak suka saya. Tapi kawan-kawan bagi support. Jangan letak jawatan.”</p> <p><i>I have been dismissed from the company by my supervisor. She always scolds me. She said I can't do the job as she wants. I have done my job. I don't know what I did wrong. But I think she don't like me. My friends give me support not to resign</i></p>

Appendix 10.1 DESCRIPTION OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

A. Malaysian Christian Association for Relief (Malaysian CARE)

Malaysian CARE is a Christian based organization offering diversified services such as residential care and community services. Beginning with just five staff when first set up in 1979, today it has over 60 staff. Apart from providing services to people with special needs, it also provides services for prisoners, drug dependents, street people and the needy community in rural and urban area.

Realising that people with disabilities are often being socially excluded in the society especially among person with intellectual disabilities, Malaysian CARE encompasses services for adults of this special group through the current service model which comprises two level of training; work preparation model and modular lesson. It is believed that with the suitable preparation and support, this group can hold and secure a job and lead a meaningful life as any other person.

B. Society of Families of Persons with Learning Difficulties (PERKOBP)

Society of Families of Persons with Learning Difficulties or Pertubuhan Keluarga Orang-orang Bermasalah Pembelajaran (PERKOBP) is a registered NGO with full membership of parents and guardians of persons with learning difficulties. It was previously known as the family support group and has been officially registered since 1993. Dedicating the organisation for

the benefits of their children with learning difficulties, it aims to equip their special children with useful skills to achieve independent living. It started with the establishment of an employment training programme and later on added a sheltered workshop to provide supported employment for those learning disabled who are unable to gain meaningful employment.

C. United Voice (UV)

United Voice (UV) is the first society of persons with learning difficulties in Malaysia which is led by persons with learning difficulties. The members of UV include persons with Down's syndrome, Autism, Attention Deficit Disorder, Global Developmental Delay and other specific learning disabilities. Firstly formed as Self Advocacy Group (SAG) in 1995, after significant development, it has been registered as a fully independent society since 2005. Since then, it has grown rapidly. More parents are beginning to realize the need to expose their children with learning disabilities to the self-advocacy movement activities so that they learn to be more independent and develop skills to speak up for themselves. Currently it has over 130 members.

Apart from these three organisations, there are actually various NGOs listed relating to persons with learning difficulties such as NASOM in Kuala Lumpur, PKIK in Kajang, Asia Community Services (ACS) in Penang, DAYBREAK in Ipoh, Bethany Home in Teluk Intan and Wisma Harapan in Kuala Lumpur. However they mostly provide a range of services and programmes for other kinds of disability and other vulnerable communities

and not specifically for persons with learning difficulties. On top of these NGOs, there is also an In-Community Centre or Pusat Dalam Komuniti (PDK) which is run by the NGOs in the community but is fully sustained by the Development for Persons with Disabilities Department (DPwDD).