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Benefits and challenges in employing people with disabilities in companies: A systematic literature review

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Introduction - context

It is estimated that in 2023, 1.3 billion people suffer from significant disabilities, representing 16% of the world's population, or 1 in 6 of us. People with disabilities (PWD) represent a special category of people who, if given the necessary conditions for growth, development, education and work, can add value to the environments in which they operate.

This paper presents a systematic review of empirical studies on the employment of PWD in companies between 2010 and 2025. With the growing interest on the one hand in human resources as key premises in increasing company performance, and on the other hand in equalizing the rights of persons with disabilities to work, this systematic review of recent developments, challenges, implications and benefits of the employment of PWD in companies is welcome.

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Research Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this systematic literature review (SLR) is to understand current and emerging practices, reported challenges, and areas for future research on the employment of PWD in companies.

The primary objective of this SLR is to identify, synthesize, and provide a comprehensive summary of recent studies on the employment of PWD in companies. **The specific objectives** are to assess the benefits and challenges of employing PWD in companies and to identify trends in factors that may drive the recruitment of PWD for employment in companies.

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Methodological Approach

This study is conducted as a systematic review of the literature. The processes are divided into **three phases**: planning, conducting the analysis, and reporting. First, the processes included in the planning stage are specifying research questions, developing an analysis protocol, and validating the developed protocol. Second, the implementation phase involves identifying relevant research, selecting primary studies, conducting quality assessment, extracting data, and analyzing the extracted data. The last step involves two processes: documenting and validating the SRL report.

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Methodological Approach - Research questions

RQ1: What are the benefits and challenges in employing PWD in companies?

RQ2: What factors can stimulate the recruitment of PWD for employment in companies?

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Methodological Approach:

Validating review protocol, Identification of relevant research, Selection of primary studies, Quality assessment , Data synthesis and analysis

- only articles published in the last fifteen years (2010 – 2025) and only those written in English were included;
- number of search databases were Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus;
- the search string was: employing AND people AND disabilities AND companies;
- were excluded: review article, book, book chapters, editorial material, review;
- included studies were filtered based on the number of citations, thus, articles that were not cited at least twice were excluded;
- the publications resulting from each database, WoS and Scopus, were combined, and duplicates were removed;
- the extracted data was tabulated or graphed to show the number of publications in the last fifteen years and their distribution, source journal titles, citations, and publication type. Finally, further analyses were conducted on the results to answer the research questions for this SLR.

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Key Results of the research

A total of 34 papers from WoS and 15 from Scopus were included, combined, and duplicates were removed. The final list included 40 publications.

Figure 1. Number of papers per year of publication

Figure 2. Type of selected publication

The number of selected papers per publication year varies between 1 and 5. The publication years 2010, 2015 and 2016 have the lowest number of selected papers, one paper each. The publication years 2012, 2013 and 2021 have 4 papers, and the years 2020 and 2024 have 6 papers each, as can be seen in Figure 1.

Of the 40 studies selected for analysis, only 2 are conference papers (see Figure 2 for percentages).

Figure 3. Citations per year of publication

Figure 4. Top 5 distribution of publications per field of study

According to Figure 3, the most citations were recorded in 2013 and 2020, namely 77 citations, respectively 67. The significantly higher number of journal papers than conference papers indicates the quality of the studies selected for analysis, implicitly a higher number of citations. Journal papers are rigorously peer-reviewed and rewritten several times before publication, while conference papers often involve general feedback instead of specific feedback. Figure 4 also shows the bias of papers in the fields of Business, Management, Environmental Studies and Rehabilitation.

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Brief Discussions

RQ1

increasing diversity, expanding talent, and increasing brand loyalty as benefits of hiring PWD

transportation difficulties, stigma, uncertainties about candidates' abilities, and the complexity of the public employment services system for PWD as employment challenges

RQ2

improving the professional skills of PWD, reducing employers' fears about work accidents among PWD, reducing tax and social security costs for companies employing PWD, establishing workplace adaptations, differentiating the employment quota rate of PWD by occupational categories, providing information to companies about PWD seeking employment as stimulating factors for hiring PWD

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RQ1

PWD stay with the same employer longer than “able-bodied” employees, meaning it may be worthwhile to make additional expenditures to hire people with disabilities who could become loyal employees for years, which is a benefit of hiring PWD

misperceptions about people with disabilities, uncertainty about the costs of workplace adaptation as challenges related to hiring PWD

RQ2

using a specialized recruitment agency, developing a specific recruitment plan and training staff in disability awareness, as well as internships are perceived as the best facilitators for employing people with disabilities

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Main Conclusions

- This SLR provides a detailed picture of the trends in PWD employment in companies. The SLR identified a total of 40 papers after a rigorous quality assessment and acceptance criteria as outlined in the protocol.
- Companies seem to value information most on PWD accommodation (environmental preparation and cost) and the impact of disability on workplace performance.

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Main Conclusions

- The literature has shown that maintaining employment is essential to guarantee the active participation of PWD in society.
- The exclusion of PWD from the workforce has costs for society, in terms of their productive potential, the cost of social protection benefits for disability and pensions, as well as implications for their families and caregivers.

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