

## THE INCLUSION INITIATIVES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE MAINSTREAM EMPLOYMENT: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE

Anisa Safiah Maznorbalia  
Faculty of Business and Management  
Universiti Teknologi MARA, 15050 Kota Bharu, Kelantan, Malaysia  
Email: anisa.maznor@gmail.com

Zurina Ismail  
Faculty of Business and Management  
Universiti Teknologi MARA, 15050 Kota Bharu, Kelantan, Malaysia  
Email: zurinaismail@uitm.edu.my

Zuhail Hussein  
Faculty of Business and Management  
Universiti Teknologi MARA, 15050 Kota Bharu, Kelantan, Malaysia  
Email: zuhal@uitm.edu.my

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### ABSTRACT

*The study is to review the literature on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in mainstream employment. Even though most scholarly studies have concentrated on the benefits and barriers on hiring persons with disabilities, many organizations are now beginning to share their diversity and inclusivity initiatives. However, there is no synthesis of the literature on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in mainstream employment. Systematic review of two major databases was performed on a limited time frame from 2016 to June 2021. Articles from the peer-reviewed publications, involving persons with disabilities and focused on inclusion in employment were selected to meet the purpose. The reviewers independently applied the selected criteria, extracted the data, and rated the study quality. Of the 1331 studies identified, 12 articles met our inclusion criteria. Findings show that the inclusion initiatives for persons with disabilities in mainstream employment included policies and legislation, organizational inclusivity, top management commitment, information technology, and social entrepreneurship. The study offers several significant contributions for practical purposes and for the body of knowledge if interested parties especially, policymakers, NGOs, researchers, and private sectors companies that can generate inclusion strategies for PWD to be involved and sustained in employment. Future research is needed to explore how the companies feel encouraged to include persons with disabilities as their labor force.*

Keywords: employment, inclusion, persons with disabilities.

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### INTRODUCTION

Employment is important for every person's well-being. It is a fundamental human right (United Nations General Assembly, 2015) that makes the person feel valuable in the society. The right to work is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) where it overtly stated that the right to employment under Article 23 with the proclamation that "everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment". Vornholt et al., (2017) also asserted the fact that work has long been known in work and organizational psychology to be beneficial to people's health and well-being. It is significant to note that, employment is especially important for persons with disabilities (PWD) because being disabled often means being socially isolated (World Health Organization, 2011), and being employed is one way to reduce this isolation and an important tool for poverty reduction (Schur, 2002). World Health Organization (2015) has defined PWD as a person who has an impairment, activity limitation, and participation restriction whereby disability and functioning are shaped by the interaction between health conditions and contextual factors. The issue of disability and employment has taken center stage on the global arena because it touches on several areas of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDG) 2030, and the number one goal which is to combat extreme poverty in all of its forms (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2016). And to reduce poverty the people need to have a stable and secure income which can be achieved through employment.

On the other hand, for organizations to have a thriving global economy, they must employ a workforce that is highly diversified because it can make one organization obtain and sustain its competitive advantage (Farnsworth et al., 2019; Zaluska et al., 2020). A diverse workforce means having varieties of employees in terms of gender, age, race, religion, and disabilities. However, PWD stands out as having low labor market representation compared to other societal groups. PWD represents the most largely untapped pool of human resources that have failed to gain recognition and inclusion in mainstream employment (Araten-Bergman, 2016; Maznorbalia et al., 2021). Although it has been several years since the United Nations enacted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2006), the employment rate for this group of people remains significantly lower in most countries in the world when compared to persons without disabilities (OECD, 2010; United Nations Development Programme, 2018).

In the United States, it was reported that only 17.9% of PWD were employed compared to 61.8% of persons without disabilities (U.S. Department of Labor, 2021). The United Kingdom also reported a large gap where 52.1% PWD were employed compared with 81.3% for without disabilities (Office for National Statistics, 2021). Similarly, in Malaysia, only 0.3% out of total registered PWD were employed in the public sector and 0.1% were employed in the private sector (Department of Social Welfare, 2020). From these reported statistics, it can be concluded that the large disparities in the number of PWD who participated in employment are very critical both in developed and developing countries. And one of the main reasons these vulnerable groups of people have been excluded and failed to get a job is due to employer's negative attitudes and perceptions (Agyei-Okyere et al., 2019; Bonaccio et al., 2020; Chordiya, 2020; Jing, 2019; Kuznetsova & Bento, 2018; Marzo Campos et al., 2020; Opoku et al., 2017; Schur et al., 2009). Although many employers have excluded PWD from entering the mainstream labor market, the literature on the inclusion and participation of PWD in employment has grown. Synthesizing this literature can highlight the positive efforts and actions taken to include PWD in the workforce and, ultimately, can provide the employers, practitioners, policymakers, and non-governmental organizations (NGO) to embark in developing more proactive initiatives to increase the inclusion of PWD in the labor market.

Several important gaps that exist in the literature are noted in this systematic review. First, reviews focusing on the employment of PWD frequently emphasize the difficulties in hiring them (Araten-Bergman, 2016; C. H. Ang, 2017), workplace discrimination (Kim et al., 2020; Luo & Wang, 2017), or attitudes toward hiring people with disabilities (Mahmud, 2009; Mansour, 2009; Marzo Campos et al., 2020) and not the actual strategies or initiatives taken to include them into the workforce. Second, most research in this area focuses on the supply side, for instances experiences of PWD in employment (Harun et al., 2020), the work ability of PWD (Lavasani et al., 2015), challenges faced by PWD to enter the labor market (Izam & Wan Mohamed, 2020; Narayanan, 2019), whereas the demand side (i.e., employer initiatives or practices and work conditions) receives little attention. It is vital to investigate demand-driven employment initiatives in order to obtain a broader insight into the actual initiatives taken in creating more inclusive employment to enhance the participation of persons with disabilities in the labor market. Lastly, while there has been a greater focus on the business case for the inclusion of PWD, existing literature evaluations on this topic primarily focus on anecdotal and non-peer reviewed (i.e., grey literature) (Allen, 2010; Australian Human Resources Institute, 2013; Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2018; World Health Organization, 2011). Therefore, there is an urgent need to consolidate and critically assess the peer-reviewed literature in order to support evidence-based decision-making (Baarends et al., 2017; Johnson et al., 2013).

## METHODOLOGY

### Search Strategy

The ROSES review protocol was used to guide the current study. ROSES or RepOrting Standards for Systematic Evidence Syntheses are specifically created for systematic reviews and mapping in the field of management (Haddaway et al., 2018). ROSES's goal is to encourage researchers to provide the right information in the right amount of detail. The authors began their SLR based on this review protocol by developing acceptable research questions for the review. The authors next go into the systematic searching strategies, which are comprised of three major sub-processes; identification, screening (inclusion and exclusion criteria), and eligibility. The authors then proceed to appraise the quality of the selected articles, explaining the technique used to ensure the quality of the articles to be examined. Finally, the authors explain how the data for the review were abstracted and how the abstracted data were analyzed and validated.

### Formulation of Research Question

PICo was used to develop the research question for this study. It is a tool that helps authors identify appropriate research question for the review (Mohamed Shaffril et al., 2020). PICo is based on three main concepts namely Population or Problem, Interest, and Context. Based on these concepts, the authors have included three main aspects in the review namely Persons with Disabilities (Population), inclusion initiative (Interest), and employment (context) which guide the authors to formulate its main research question – What are the initiatives in enhancing the inclusion of persons with disabilities (PWD) in the mainstream employment?

### Systematic Searching Strategies

The systematic searching strategies procedure consists of three major steps: identification, screening, and eligibility (Figure 1).

### Identification

Identification is the process of searching for any synonyms, related terms, and variations for the study's main keywords, which are persons with disabilities, inclusion, and employment. It seeks to give the selected database more possibilities for searching more related articles for the review. The keywords were developed based on the research question (Okoli, 2015), and the identification procedure relied on an online thesaurus, keywords used in previous studies, keywords provided by Scopus, and keywords suggested by experts (Table 1). On the two major databases, Scopus and Web of Science, the authors were able to expand the existing keywords and generate comprehensive search strings (based on Boolean operator, phrase searching, truncation, wild card, and field code functions) (Table 2). These two databases have the potential to be the leading databases in a systematic literature review due to several advantages such as advanced searching functions, comprehensiveness (indexing more than 5000 publishers), quality control of articles, and a multidisciplinary focus, including studies on disabilities management (Haddaway et al., 2018; Martín-Martín et al., 2018). The searching process in these two databases, Scopus and Web of Science, resulted in a total of 1331 articles.

**Table 1 Enriched Keywords**

Keywords	Main keywords	Enriched Keywords
	1) Person with disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People with disability</li> <li>• Disabled person</li> <li>• PWD</li> </ul>
	2) Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work</li> <li>• Job</li> <li>• Hiring</li> </ul>
	3) Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusivity</li> <li>• Involvement</li> </ul>
Databases	Leading Database Used <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scopus</li> <li>• Web of Science</li> </ul>	
Various searching techniques	Advanced searching <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full search string</li> </ul>	

**Table 2 Full Search String for Systematic Searching**

Database	Search String
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY ( ( "person with disability*" OR "people with disability*" OR "disabled person*" OR "PWD*" ) AND ( "employment" OR "work" OR "job" OR "hiring" ) AND ( "inclusion" OR "inclusivity" OR "involvement" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( PUBYEAR , 2021 ) OR LIMIT-TO ( PUBYEAR , 2020 ) OR LIMIT-TO ( PUBYEAR , 2019 ) OR LIMIT-TO ( PUBYEAR , 2018 ) OR LIMIT-TO ( PUBYEAR , 2017 ) OR LIMIT-TO ( PUBYEAR , 2016 ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( DOCTYPE , "ar" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( LANGUAGE , "English" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( SRCTYPE , "j" ) )
Web of Science	(TS=( ( "person with disability*" OR "people with disability*" OR "disabled person*" OR "PWD*" ) AND ( "employment" OR "work" OR "job" OR "hiring" ) AND ( "inclusion" OR "inclusivity" OR "involvement" ) )) Refined by: PUBLICATION YEARS: (2021 OR 2016 OR 2020 OR 2019 OR 2018 OR 2017) AND DOCUMENT TYPES: (ARTICLE) AND LANGUAGES: (ENGLISH)

### Screening

This study screened all the 1331 selected articles by choosing the criteria for articles selection which is done automatically based on the sorting function available in the database. As suggested by Brereton et al. (2007), the selection criteria are based on the research question. As it is almost impossible for the researchers to review all the existing published articles, hence, Okoli (2015) suggested the researchers should determine the range of period that they are able to review. Therefore, the timeline between 2016 and June 2021 was selected as one of the inclusion criteria. Furthermore, to ensure the quality of the review, only articles published in a journal are included. Moreover, only articles published in English are incorporated in the review to avoid confusion in understanding (Table 3). This process had excluded 969 articles as they did not fit the inclusion criteria and removed 36 duplicated articles. The remaining 326 articles were used for the third process which is eligibility.

**Table 3 The Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Timeline	2016-June 2021	< 2016
Document Type	Article Journal	Chapters in book, book series, book, conference proceeding, report,
Language	English	Non-English

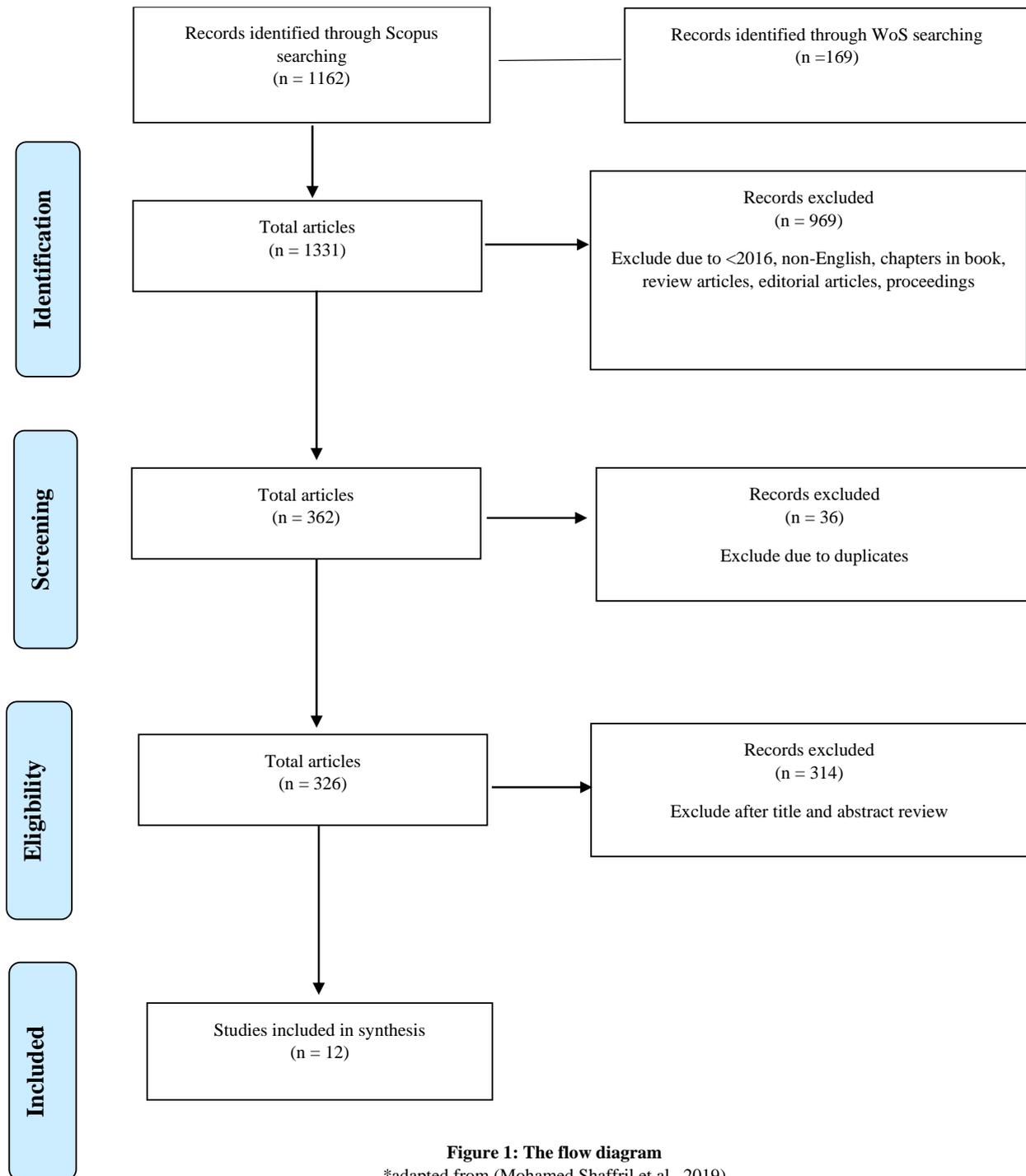
### Eligibility

Eligibility is the third process where the authors manually monitored the retrieved articles to ensure all the remaining articles (after the screening process) are in line with the criteria. This process was done by reading the title and abstract of the articles. This process excluded 314 articles due to focus on social inclusion rather than employment inclusion, focus on education rather than employment, focus on perceptions of PWD in employment rather than initiatives for PWD in employment, focus on barriers on the inclusion of PWD in employment, focus on the rights of PWD in employment, and published in the form of a chapter in book. Overall, there were only 12 selected articles.

### Quality Appraisal

The remaining articles were presented to two experts for quality assessment in order to ensure the quality of the content. Petticrew and Roberts (2006) proposed that experts classify the remaining articles into three quality levels: high, moderate, and low. Only articles with a high or moderate rating should be reviewed. The experts concentrated on the methodology of the articles in order to calculate the quality rank. In order for the articles to be included in the review, both authors must agree that the quality is at least moderate. Before selecting whether or not to include or exclude articles from the review, they discussed any disagreements. This

procedure had assigned a high rating to eight articles and a moderate rating to four articles. As a result, all of the remaining articles were eligible for evaluation.



## RESULTS

Five themes emerged from the findings which are policies and legislation, organizational inclusivity, top management commitment, information technology, and social entrepreneurs. Our of 12 articles analyzed in this study, four of them stated that having a disability inclusion policy and legislation are the most significant initiatives to enhance the inclusion of PWD in mainstream employment. Another four of them stated the inclusivity practices by organizations give positive effects to the inclusion of PWD in the labor market, on the other hand, two of the articles evidenced the high commitment play by the top management influence the high inclusion of PWD. Finally, having good technology and social entrepreneurship also assists PWD to be included in mainstream employment as stated in the other two of the articles in this study. See Table 4 for a summary of the findings.

**Table 4 The Results of Included Articles**

No	Authors/Year/Country	Findings
1	(Chan et al., 2020) United States	Disability inclusion practices policy - include disability in the company's diversity and inclusion policies and procedures. <b>(Companies' policies)</b> Senior management (leadership) plays a significant role in supporting the inclusion of PWD in the workplaces, along with their influence on fostering an inviting atmosphere for PWD to perform their jobs successfully in the organization. <b>(Top management commitment)</b>
2	(Paz-Maldonado & Silva-Peña, 2020) Latin America	Implemented PWD employment quota legislation in both public and private sectors <b>(States' legislations)</b>
3	(Bezyak et al., 2020) USA	Including disability as a major part of the company's inclusion and diversity policies and procedures was found as the most significant strategy for hiring intention by the employers. <b>(Companies' policies)</b>
4	(Kuznetsova & Yalcin, 2017) Sweden and Norway	Inclusive targeted corporate policies and programs and proactive corporate social responsibility are the important measures to ensure the inclusion of PWD in employment. <b>(Companies' policies)</b>
5	(Kuznetsova & Bento, 2018) Norway	Workplace's adaptations practices in the companies such as time changes of working time and changes of task gave positive effects on the inclusion of employment of PWD. <b>(Organizational inclusivity)</b>
6	(Pérez-Conesa et al., 2017) Spain	Normalization of disability in the work environment effectively leads to high levels of inclusion. <b>(Organizational inclusivity)</b>
7	(Bam & Ronnie, 2020) South Africa	Inclusionary practices during the induction phase are critically important for the early experiences of inclusion in the workplace for PWD. <b>(Organizational inclusivity)</b>
8	(Merhej, 2020) Lebanon	More familiarity and contact with, more visibility of, and more market-competent training for people with disabilities is needed to enhance their inclusion in employment. <b>(Organizational inclusivity)</b>
9	(Maini & Heera, 2019) India	Top management commitment, inclusive culture, supportive workplace, and disability-HRM fit are the major factors affecting the inclusion of disabled persons at the workplace. <b>(Top management commitment)</b>
10	(Marques et al., 2020) Brazil	Managers with a spiritual conception of disability and a conception based on the idea of inclusion perceive the insertion of PWDs as beneficial to both the organizational climate and organizational image. <b>(Top management commitment)</b>
11	(Mark et al., 2019) European (Norway, Austria, and Italy)	Used industry 4.0 through worker assistance systems (i.e., sensorial aid, physical aid systems, and cognitive aid systems) can increase the inclusion of PWD in manufacturing sectors. <b>(Information technology)</b>
12	(Kalargyrou et al., 2018) USA	Social entrepreneurship (SE) is one of the ways to solve the discrimination against PWD in the labor market as they intend to increase the participation of PWD in employment and awareness of the public on PWD circumstances. Besides, SE used VRIO framework and Blue Ocean Strategy in hiring PWD to become more competitive advantage and at the same time increase the inclusion of PWD in the labor market. <b>(Social entrepreneurship)</b>

## DISCUSSIONS

### Policies and Legislations

This systematic review demonstrates that the inclusion of PWD in employment can be enhanced through policies and legislation by the organization itself or formulated by the state government. As an example, Chan et al., (2020) conducted research using a sample of 466 human resources managers and professionals and reported that, include disability in the company's diversity and inclusion policies and procedures was scored the highest as the most important practices for disability inclusion. Next, a study by Bezyak et al., (2020) also shows that 180 employers had agreed that including disability as the major part of the company's inclusion and diversity policies and procedures was the most important strategy for the hiring intention of PWD. On the other hand, Kuznetsova and Yalcin, (2017) whose conducted interviews with senior and middle-level managers of four large companies in

Sweden and Norway provide evidenced that policies formulated by the state government (i.e. anti-discrimination policies and equality principles) shows less effective towards the inclusion of PWD in employment, instead more inclusive targeted corporate policy, sustainability programs, and proactive corporate social responsibility in the companies themselves were suggested to be the important measures in enhancing the inclusion of PWD in the labor market. Similarly, Paz-Maldonado and Silva-Peña (2020) stated that most of the countries in Latin America (i.e. Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, and Venezuela) had implemented legislation for the inclusion of PWD in employment which is quota employment policy, where the organization in the states are required to hire a minimum of PWD based on the percentage of employment policy quotas for PWD that have been set in each country ranging from 1%-10%. It is important to note that, as quota legislation is just beginning to develop in those countries, it does still not show any drastic positive effects, but somehow it does make public especially employers aware on the issues encircling PWD and urge them to hire more PWD. In summary, policies and legislation explicitly for the rights of PWD to participate in the labor market are one of the most important initiatives in enhancing the inclusion of PWD in the mainstream labor market. Plus, it is truly vital for PWD to be included in employment because having a secure job would make them live a sustainable live and could also contribute to the socio-economic growth of the country by having a diversity workforce.

### **Organizational Inclusivity**

Under this theme, this study obtained two sub-themes. First is workplace adaptations. Workplace adaptation is one of the practices of the companies to create a more inclusive culture where the companies will adjust their operation according to the suitability of the PWD. A study by Kuznetsova and Bento (2018), where they conducted qualitative interviews with 12 senior and middle managers of large companies in Norway stated that, flexibility, changes of working time, and changes of task were the initiatives provided by the organizations in supporting the participation and inclusion of PWD employees in the companies. Second is normalization or familiarity of disability. A study by Pérez-Conesa et al., (2017) interviewed 46 managers in different companies in Spain affirmed that making the working environment as normalization for disability effectively leads to a high level of inclusion for PWD. It was suggested that when the organizational environment has normalized diversity like disabilities, it is, therefore, a means to develop an inclusive culture in the organizations. Furthermore, a literature analysis performed by Merhej (2020) stated that more familiarity with the PWD in the workplaces is also needed to enhance their inclusion in employment. For example, making PWD more visible and keep in contact with them make these special groups of employees feel part of the organization. Bam and Ronnie (2020) added that it is important for organizations to start early experiences of inclusion in the workplace, that is inclusionary practices during the employee induction phase so that PWD employees can get familiar with the workplace environment and the employees without disabilities also can get familiar having the PWD colleagues in the workplace. As both employees will be working together, they need to be familiar with each other, such as knowing how they work, what their strengths are and weaknesses for thriving in the job's performance. The inclusivity practices by the organization also very crucial in supporting and enhancing the inclusion of PWD in the employment as it recognizes PWD as one of the employees in organization and therefore, the PWD themselves will be comfortable to work in such acceptable environment.

### **Top Management**

In any organization, big or small, leadership plays a very critical role in nurturing the employees to thrive in whatever job they do. The same goes for the inclusion of PWD in the workplace, as Chan et al. (2020) reported that senior management plays a significant role in supporting the inclusion of PWD in the workplaces, as well as their influence on creating an appealing environment for PWD to successfully do their tasks in the organization. Next, Maini and Heera (2019) also stated that apart from inclusive culture and supportive workplace, top management commitment are the main factors affecting the inclusion of disabled persons at the workplace based on the evidence by 108 managers in India. Similarly, Marques et al. (2020) conducted a study using a sample of 257 managers in large public organizations in Brazil stated that managers (top management) with a high spiritual conception of disability on the ideas and conception based on the idea of inclusion perceived the inclusion of PWD as beneficial to both organizational climate and organizational image. Top management commitment in supporting the inclusion of PWD in the mainstream employment does give positive effect for PWD in building their confidence when performing their job. Therefore, this initiative should be taken in consideration by the organization in enhancing the inclusion of persons with disabilities (PWD) in the employment.

### **Information Technology**

Information technology would be a great benefit in assisting PWD in performing an activity that they are not capable to do so such as the new industry 4.0. Industry 4.0 or the fourth industrial revolution is the ongoing automation of traditional manufacturing and industrial practices using modern smart technology. Mark et al. (2019) stated that the use of industry 4.0 in Norway, Austria, and Italy through worker assistance systems (i.e., sensorial aid, physical aid system, and cognitive aid system) can increase the inclusion of PWD in employment, especially in the manufacturing sectors. In this new globalization era, modern information technology would be very useful for PWD in enhancing their inclusion in the labor market.

### **Social Entrepreneurship**

According to Grimes et al. (2013), social entrepreneurship is the process of employing market-based techniques to solve social problems. As the underemployment of PWD occurred around the world, social entrepreneurship has been a new way in tackling that social problem. A study by Kalargyrou et al. (2018) regarding social entrepreneurship and disability inclusion in the hospital industry in the United States confirmed that by set-up this social enterprise explicitly to help PWD in getting a job is very encouraging as the number of PWD involve in the labor force is increasing. Apart from that, the awareness of the public regarding PWD also rising and PWD gets empowerment through training and exposure in the community by this social entrepreneurship. Recently, this initiative has been widely-used in the United States to increase the participation number of PWD in the labor force market.

## RECOMMENDATION

This study suggested several recommendations for the consideration of future scholars. First, more studies are needed to review the inclusion of PWD in other scopes of life such as education as it is also a vital aspect of life that will influence the future direction of PWD in achieving sustainable living (Abdul Wahab & Ayub, 2016). As sustainable living has become the main target for every country through the adoption of Sustainable Development Goals 2030 (SDGs), future studies should investigate how PWD can achieve sustainable living in this current era and what has been done for PWD to have a sustainable life. Lastly, through this systematic review, it can be seen that policies implemented by the companies show a remarkable strategy in enhancing the inclusion of PWD in employment which also lead to the overall sustainable development growth of the country. Therefore, future studies could explore how the companies feel encouraged to include PWD as their labor force. For example, is it related to corporate social responsibility or otherwise?

## CONCLUSION

The recent literature on the inclusion initiatives of persons with disabilities (PWD) in the mainstream employment reflects a basic understanding of how the stakeholders all around the world are trying to help PWD to be included in society especially in employment. Therefore, this study had systematically reviewed the initiatives taken in enhancing the inclusion of PWD in mainstream employment and has identified five initiatives. The first initiative is the policies and legislations regulated by the companies or government. The policies and legislation are exclusively to protect the right of PWD to be included in employment for example by implementing disability policies (Bezyak et al., 2020; Chan et al., 2020) and quota system (Paz-Maldonado & Silva-Peña, 2020). Second initiative is organizational inclusivity which consist of two themes, workplace adaptations and normalization of disability in the workplace. For workplace adaptations initiatives, the companies create more inclusive culture where they will adjust their operation according to the suitability of the PWD, and for normalization of disability, the companies create a disability environment for all the employees so that they will be familiar with the PWD colleagues. Third is top management commitment where the leader in the company is being supportive in supporting and nurturing the PWD employees in their company. Fourth is information technology that can assist PWD in performing their task. Lastly is social entrepreneurship that hire PWD to solve the issue of underemployment. Overall, the study offers several significant contributions for practical purposes and the body of knowledge. The interested parties especially, policymakers, NGOs, researchers, private sectors can generate inclusion strategies for PWD to be involved and sustain in employment. Furthermore, the results inform the researchers on the specific areas and content of studies related to persons with disabilities that should be the focus of their studies. In terms of limitation, this study used limited databases which are Scopus and WOS, therefore, the selection number of articles also may be limited for the reviewed.

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