

Development of a Workforce Inclusion Framework to Enhance Employability of Persons with Low Vision in The Philippines

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Abstract

This dissertation, titled *“Workforce Inclusion Framework to Enhance the Employability of Persons with Low Vision in the Philippines,”* examined the barriers, support systems, and inclusive strategies necessary to improve employment opportunities and long-term workforce participation among persons with low vision. Anchored on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), the study aimed to develop a holistic and evidence-based workforce inclusion framework that could guide disability-inclusive employment policies, vocational rehabilitation programs, and workforce development initiatives in the Philippine context. The study utilized a convergent parallel mixed methods design grounded in the pragmatic research paradigm. Purposive sampling was employed involving individuals with low vision who were employed or actively seeking employment, together with employers, rehabilitation professionals, and government representatives engaged in disability employment and rehabilitation services. Quantitative data were gathered using structured survey questionnaires and analyzed using weighted mean and standard deviation, while qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions were analyzed through thematic analysis. Quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated through triangulation to generate a comprehensive understanding of workforce inclusion among persons with low vision. Findings



revealed that existing training programs and rehabilitation services positively contributed to employment readiness and skills development among persons with low vision. Respondents emphasized the importance of specialized training, individualized coaching, workplace accessibility, assistive technology integration, psychosocial support, and inclusive hiring practices. However, persistent barriers such as inaccessible workplaces, fragmented rehabilitation systems, stigma and discrimination, limited access to assistive technologies, and inadequate implementation of disability-inclusive policies continue to hinder sustainable employment and career advancement. The study identified six major domains necessary for workforce inclusion and developed a Workforce Inclusion Framework integrating employability assessment, competency-based training, assistive technology and accessibility, employer engagement, psychosocial support, and policy alignment. The study concluded that sustainable workforce inclusion for persons with low vision requires a coordinated, multi-sectoral, and systems-oriented approach strengthened through collaborative institutional partnerships and disability-inclusive employment policies.

Keywords: *Low vision, workforce inclusion, employability, disability inclusion, vocational rehabilitation, assistive technology, psychosocial support, employer readiness, sustainable development goals, Philippines*

Bio-profile

A dedicated optometrist and educator with over 30 years of experience in the field. She has been a faculty member at the Centro Escolar University (CEU) School of Optometry for three decades, where she has played a significant role in shaping future professionals. Since 2023, she has served as the head of the CEU Community Outreach Department, continuing her long-standing commitment to service, having actively participated in outreach activities for 30 years.

In addition to her academic role, she runs a private optometry clinic, maintaining a thriving clinical practice.

Passionate about continuous learning, she has attended numerous local and international conferences focused on education, research, optometry, and community service.



Introduction

Most people agree that employment is necessary for social engagement, economic independence, and personal dignity. Beyond achieving financial security, fulfilling employment enables people to grow in self-assurance, make friends, and actively participate in society. Having a meaningful job helps to self-respect, identity, and involvement in society. However, fair access to employment opportunities continues to be a chronic barrier for many people with disabilities, especially those with limited eyesight.

Low vision is a visual condition that cannot be fully treated with conventional interventions like eyeglasses, contact lenses, medication, or surgery. While many people with low vision still have some functional sight, they frequently encounter obstacles when performing tasks that require fine detail recognition, mobility, and rapid visual processing. These functional limitations are further exacerbated by inaccessible workplaces, discrimination, limited vocational support, and inadequate implementation of disability-inclusive policies. Even though people with impaired vision frequently have some functional sight, many nonetheless struggle to complete tasks requiring sustained visual attention, movement, and detailed visual processing. Even yet, those with limited vision still have some functional vision, they often face difficulties carrying out tasks that call for quick visual processing, movement, and the recognition of fine details. Inaccessible workplaces, prejudice, a lack of vocational assistance, and inadequate disability-inclusive policy implementation all exacerbate these functional constraints.

Despite the increasing availability of assistive technology and the implementation of disability-inclusive legislation, millions of people with visual impairments still face significant obstacles when trying to find work. In many developing nations, including the Philippines, these obstacles are still closely linked to social attitudes, limited accessibility, inadequate vocational preparation, and weak institutional support. People with low vision continue to face disproportionately high rates of unemployment and underemployment in the Philippines, and existing vocational rehabilitation programs frequently remain fragmented, generalized, and insufficiently responsive to their particular needs. These obstacles are still closely linked to social attitudes, restricted access, poor career preparation, and weak institutional assistance. People with impaired eyesight continue to face disproportionately high rates of underemployment and unemployment in the Philippines. Programs for vocational rehabilitation that are now in place frequently continue to be disjointed, broad, and inadequately sensitive to the requirements of people with impaired vision.

Although accessibility has been enhanced by assistive technology like screen readers, magnifiers, and adaptive software, technical developments by themselves are not enough



to guarantee long-term workforce inclusion. There are still misconceptions among employers about workplace integration, accommodation costs, and productivity.

to obstruct employment procedures that are inclusive. Employment chances are further diminished by restricted access to workplace accommodations, emotional support, and specialized training.

This study acknowledges that employment for people with impaired vision goes beyond the problem of visual impairment per se. Environmental accessibility, workplace culture, employer readiness, educational preparation, psychosocial support, and the general responsiveness of institutions toward inclusion all have a significant impact on employment chances. A comprehensive and coordinated strategy combining government agencies, rehabilitation facilities, educational institutions, employers, and civil society is needed to address these issues.

Based on the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations, specifically SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), this study sought to create a Workforce Inclusion Framework that improves employability and encourages long-term workforce participation among Filipinos with low vision.

The study's specific objectives were to:

Identify the obstacles that people with low vision face when trying to find mainstream employment;

Analyze current training and employment support systems;

Assess the degree to which current interventions address employability needs;

Create a workforce inclusion framework for sustainable employment integration; and

Offer policy recommendations for disability-inclusive employment practices.

The results of this study may help improve vocational rehabilitation services, inclusive employment policies, employer readiness, and workforce accessibility initiatives in the Philippines.



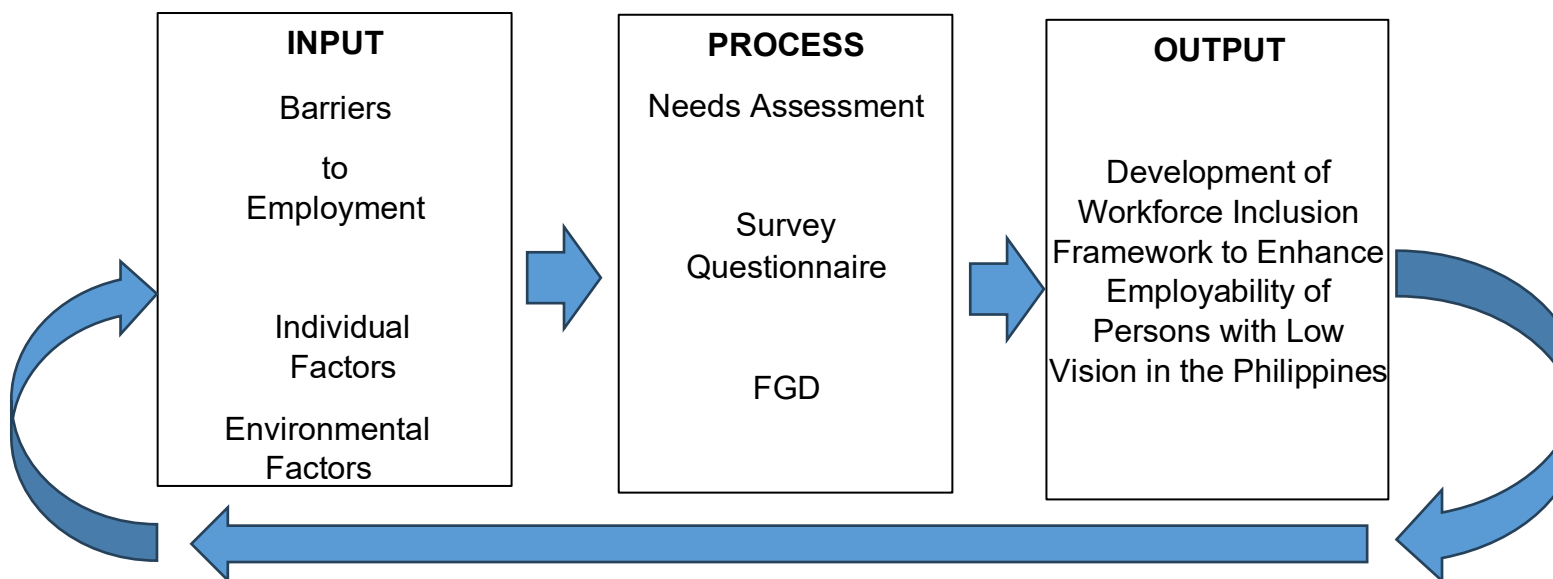
Theoretical Framework Inclusive Development Theory



The Inclusive Development Theory (Akinsanya & Makinwa-Adebusoye, 2017), which had been modified for this research, served as the foundation for analyzing and addressing the multiple, interrelated aspects of barriers that hindered employability among individuals with low vision.

The visual representation of the Inclusive Development Theory illustrated an active, interconnected system of equity, participation, and empowerment with respect to employment inclusion at each stage of development.

Conceptual Framework Input Process Output



This study established a logical progression of thought from identifying problems (input) through intervention strategies (process) to measurable outcomes (output). This framework not only guided the research method and analysis but also facilitated addressing all components of the employability ecosystem in an integrated manner, thereby producing actionable and sustainable results. In this way, the framework demonstrated the complex and interrelated nature of the employment issues individuals with low vision encountered. The researcher's approach, as shown in the framework, was one of holistic representation rather than linear representation, illustrating the interaction between individual, environmental, and systemic variables that occurred through a targeted intervention process leading to measurable outcomes.

The left side of the framework consisted of the variables that the researcher identified as the input. These variables were divided into three domains of factors that served as barriers to employment for people with visual impairment: individual, environmental, and systemic. The middle section of the framework outlined the process component of the intervention. The stages of intervention began with a needs assessment derived from the input variables, ensuring that the solution developed by the researcher reflected real, data-based needs. The next step involved conducting a survey questionnaire and focus group discussion, which served as the basis for developing a framework for increasing the employability of people with low vision in the workforce.

The interventions led to observable output variables arranged into three outcome areas on the right side of the framework. These areas were: (1) **Better Employer**, which included improved placement rates, improved retention rates, greater job satisfaction, and career advancement (i.e., promotions and salary increases); (2) **More Workforce Equality**, which involved measuring an increased number of people with low vision employed across various workplace sectors; and (3) **Enhanced Career Policy & Practice**, which related to documenting progress in the number of businesses that had adopted inclusive hiring policies and practices, as well as the development of such policies at local, regional, or national levels.



In summary, the conceptual framework illustrated that employability was not simply an individual problem but was shaped by a web of interrelated influences. In this dynamic, multi-factorial model, the researcher aimed to create a viable pathway that would provide a more permanent and inclusive way for people with low vision to participate in the workforce in an impactful and sustainable manner.

Research Questions

The research aimed to investigate and design a targeted training and support system that enhanced employability outcomes for individuals with low vision, while also promoting systemic change within employment sectors. This investigation sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the biggest challenges experienced by employees with low vision while looking for mainstream employment opportunities?
2. What are the existing training and employment support programs for people with low vision?
3. To what extent do the existing training and employment support programs address the needs of individuals with limited vision?
4. What training and support systems for people with low vision can be proposed to increase their employability?
5. What policy suggestions might be made to encourage inclusive hiring practices for individuals with low vision in the public, private, and educational sectors based on stakeholder engagement?



Literature Review

Theoretical and Policy Foundations

The focus of contemporary disability discourse has shifted from deficit-oriented biomedical models to rights-based and empowerment-focused approaches. Oliver's (1990) Social Model of Disability highlights that societal and environmental barriers, rather than individual impairments, are the primary cause of disability. As a result, in the context of employment, exclusion among people with low vision is associated with inaccessible environments, discriminatory practices, and inadequate institutional support. According to Oliver's (1990) Social Model of Disability, environmental and societal barriers—rather than personal limitations—are the main causes of disability. Therefore, discriminatory practices, inaccessible surroundings, and a lack of institutional support are associated with exclusion among people with impaired vision in the workplace.

Sen's Capability Approach (1999), which supports this viewpoint, emphasizes the significance of giving people real chances to participate meaningfully in society. The employability and quality of life of people with low vision are directly impacted by access to education, assistive technology, vocational training, and inclusive workplaces.

The Magna Carta for Disabled Persons (RA 7277), Republic Act No. 10524, and the Accessibility Law (BP Blg. 344) are some of the legal frameworks in the Philippines that enable disability-inclusive employment. Workforce inclusion is nevertheless constrained by implementation issues in spite of these regulations.

Employment Barriers Among Persons with Low Vision

Inaccessible physical settings, a lack of assistive technology, insufficient workplace accommodations, employer misconceptions, and discrimination are just a few of the obstacles that people with low vision face in the workplace. According to studies, many businesses still overestimate the expenses of accommodations and underestimate the ability of people with visual impairments.

Inadequate coordination between organizations in charge of employment, education, and disability services, as well as disjointed vocational rehabilitation systems, contribute to the persistence of institutional barriers.

Workforce participation is further impacted by psychosocial issues like anxiety, social stigma, and low self-confidence.

Assistive Technology and Workforce Inclusion



People with low eyesight now have more options thanks to developments in assistive technology. Workplace involvement and freedom have increased thanks to screen readers, magnifiers, optical equipment, AI-assisted tools, and digital accessibility platforms. However, expensive prices, restricted accessibility, and compatibility problems continue to be significant obstacles, especially in underdeveloped nations.

Research indicates that when assistive technology is incorporated into all-encompassing workplace inclusion systems that include organizational support, employer training, and accessible policies, it becomes more effective.

Vocational Rehabilitation and Employer Readiness

Through skills training, work immersion, assistive technology training, and job placement support, vocational rehabilitation programs play a crucial role in preparing people with low vision for employment. In the Philippines, NGO-led programs like Resources for the Blind, Inc. and Adaptive Technology for Rehabilitation, Integration and Empowerment of the Visually Impaired have shown positive employment outcomes through customized and technology-integrated interventions. Resources for the Blind, Inc. and Adaptive Technology for Rehabilitation, Integration, and Empowerment of the Visually Impaired are two NGO-led projects in the Philippines that have shown positive job outcomes using customized and technology-integrated interventions.

Workforce inclusion is also much influenced by employer readiness. Studies show that companies with inclusive recruiting practices, disability sensitivity training, and accessibility programs are more likely to effectively hire and retain employees with visual impairments. Employers who have inclusive recruiting practices, disability sensitivity training, and accessibility initiatives are more likely to effectively hire and keep employees with visual impairments, according to research.

Organizational and psychosocial factors.

For those with limited vision, psychosocial support networks such as peer mentoring, family encouragement, counseling, and job support greatly enhance employability and retention. Long-term employment sustainability is also impacted by workplace inclusion, leadership support, and organizational culture.

Research Gap



The employability of people with low vision in the Philippine context has not received much attention in studies on disability employment and vocational rehabilitation; existing interventions are still disjointed and inadequately integrated across training, psychosocial support, assistive technology, employer engagement, and policy implementation. This study fills this gap by creating a comprehensive Workforce Inclusion Framework based on empirical data and stakeholder perspectives. Existing interventions remain fragmented and insufficiently integrated across training, psychosocial support, assistive technology, employer engagement, and policy implementation. By creating a thorough Workforce Inclusion Framework based on empirical data and stakeholder viewpoints, our study closes this gap.

Method

Research Design

In order to provide a thorough knowledge of workforce inclusion among people with impaired vision, the study used a convergent parallel mixed methods design based on the pragmatic research paradigm. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently. In order to give a thorough knowledge of workforce inclusion among people with limited vision, both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered simultaneously.

Research Setting

The study was conducted within selected institutions, organizations, rehabilitation centers, and workplaces in Metro Manila, Philippines.

Participants and Sampling

Purposive sampling was employed involving individuals with low vision who were either employed or actively seeking employment, employers, rehabilitation professionals, and government representatives engaged in disability employment and rehabilitation services.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Included participants were adults diagnosed with low vision according to World Health Organization criteria. Individuals with total blindness or other unrelated disabilities were excluded from the study.



Research Instruments

Structured survey questions, interview guides, and focus group discussion procedures were utilized to gather data on employment impediments, organizational preparedness, psychosocial support, training experiences, and policy viewpoints. Tools centered on training experiences, emotional support, organizational preparedness, employment hurdles, and policy viewpoints.

Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained. Rehabilitation clinics, organizations, and partner institutions were used to recruit participants; accessible communication formats were used for surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Rehab facilities, associations, and affiliated establishments were used to find participants. Accessible communication modes were used for focus groups, interviews, and surveys.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using weighted mean and standard deviation. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Integration and triangulation of findings were conducted during interpretation.

Ethical Considerations

Informed permission, confidentiality, voluntary involvement, and adjustments for accessibility were among the ethical criteria that the study adhered to. At any point during the study, participants were made aware of their right to withdraw.

Results and Discussions

Employment Barriers Among Persons with Low Vision

The results showed that participants faced a variety of challenges in obtaining and maintaining employment, including inaccessible workplaces, limited access to assistive technology, transportation issues, workplace discrimination, and inadequate employer awareness regarding disability inclusion. Many respondents reported experiences involving inaccessible work environments, insufficient workplace accommodations, transportation challenges, and limited opportunities for career advancement. Numerous



respondents shared their experiences with inaccessible workplaces, inadequate workplace accommodations, difficulties with transportation, and little prospects for professional growth. Workplace discrimination, transportation issues, restricted access to assistive technology, inaccessible workplaces, and low employer understanding of disability inclusion were among the main issues.

Psychosocial issues such as diminished self-confidence, anxiety during job applications, fear of rejection, and emotional stress related to social stigma and workplace discrimination were also mentioned by a number of individuals.

These results are in line with both domestic and international research highlighting the complexity of employment exclusion due to disabilities.

Existing Training and Support Systems

Respondents agreed that employment preparedness and skill development were positively impacted by current vocational rehabilitation and training programs. Participants did, however, stress the necessity of more specialized and tailored instruction created especially for those with impaired vision.

Programs that combined career coaching, job immersion, mentorship, and assistive technology training were thought to be more successful than generalist therapies.

Employer Readiness and Organizational Support

Although employer stakeholders showed a willingness to support inclusive employment practices, a number of companies lacked proper workplace accommodations, disability sensitivity training, and formal accessible rules. However, a number of firms lacked sufficient workplace modifications, disability sensitivity training, and organized accessible policies.

The results imply that without organizational structures that promote long-term inclusion, employer transparency on its own is inadequate.

Psychosocial and Institutional Challenges

Employability and retention were found to be significantly impacted by psychosocial assistance, according to thematic analysis. Participants stressed the value of family support, counseling, peer support, and mentoring.

Another significant factor affecting continuity of support was found to be institutional fragmentation among government agencies, educational institutions, and rehabilitation providers.



Proposed Workforce Inclusion Framework

Six interrelated domains made up the Workforce Inclusion Framework created by the study:

- Assessment and Individual Employability Planning
- Competency-Based Skills Training and Work Immersion
- Assistive Technology Provision and Workplace Accessibility Integration
- Employer Engagement and Supported Inclusive Hiring
- Psychosocial Support, Coaching and Mentorship
- Governance, Policy Alignment, and Monitoring and Evaluation

The framework emphasizes how crucial coordinated, multi-sectoral, systems-oriented initiatives are for encouraging people with low vision to participate in the labor over the long term.

Conclusions

The study showed that employability among people with impaired vision is influenced by larger environmental, psychological, technical, and institutional issues in addition to visual constraints. Although they offer worthwhile chances for workforce engagement, current initiatives are still dispersed and inadequately integrated.

In order to promote sustainable workforce inclusion, employers, rehabilitation facilities, educational institutions, government agencies, and community stakeholders must work together more effectively. Meaningful employment for people with low vision cannot be attained through isolated interventions alone; instead, coordinated and inclusive systems of support are needed. Sustainable workforce inclusion necessitates not only the development of technical skills but also accessible workplaces, employer readiness, assistive technology integration, psychosocial support, and policy implementation. For people with limited vision, meaningful employment requires coordinated and inclusive systems of assistance rather than individual initiatives. In addition to developing technical skills, accessible workplaces, employer preparedness, assistive technology integration, psychosocial support, and policy execution are all necessary for sustainable workforce inclusion.

Future disability-inclusive employment programs, vocational rehabilitation programs, and workforce development strategies in the Philippines may be guided by the comprehensive and empirically supported Workforce Inclusion Framework presented in this study.



Recommendations

In the light of the findings, the following are recommended:

1. For Government Agencies

Establish a national employability strategy for people with low vision and visual impairments. Enhance enforcement measures for disability employment legislation. Subsidize or initiate assistance programs for the provision of assistive devices and employer inclusion programs. Foster collaboration among stakeholders in the areas of labor, rehabilitation services, local governments, and employers.

2. For Employers

Create a long-term disability inclusion education program to educate Human Resource people, supervisors, & managers. Make sure there is equitable access (and inclusion) to all recruitment, new hire onboarding, and performance management processes, as well as understanding of how to accommodate employees with low vision. Work as a partner with rehabilitation centers and training centers to place and retain workers with low vision.

3. For Rehabilitation Centers and Supporting Institutions

Link training programs to industry needs and work requirements in different sectors more directly. Enhance assistance with technology training and preparation for digital work. Establish or improve methods for tracking employment and retention. Develop employer partnerships systematically instead of just making ad hoc referrals.

4. For Educational Institutions

Utilize employability, readiness and inclusive disability modules in educational programs for blind and visually impaired pupils. Create ongoing partnerships between higher education and business/industry to assist with smooth transition from education to employment for disabled students. Support/Develop inclusive employment counselling systems for student and work-related transition disciplines.



5. For Future Researchers

Test and verify the suggested model in practical recruitment and learning environments. Undertake longitudinal research to examine job placements, employee retention, and job satisfaction. Look into the role of rurality and regions in determining how employability constraints operate in non-urban locations. Study digital employment, telecommuting, and technologically mediated participation in the workforce among visually impaired workers.

Acknowledgement

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Above all, the researcher expresses her deepest gratitude to her family, whose unwavering love, patience, and belief provided constant strength during moments of challenge and doubt.

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