



International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Growth Evaluation.

From echo chamber to orchestra: Orchestrating job empowerment for deaf employees in Jeddah

Najwa Basonbul ^{1*}, Fatima Fassi ²

¹⁻²Department of Special Education, King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

* Corresponding Author: **Najwa Basonbul**

Article Info

ISSN (online): 2582-7138

Volume: 05

Issue: 03

May-June 2024

Received: 08-03-2024

Accepted: 13-04-2024

Page No: 288-297

Abstract

Deaf individuals in the Saudi labour market face significant hurdles, adversely impacting their professional integration. This study investigates the reality of job empowerment for Deaf employees from their perspective in Jeddah, aiming to illuminate the nuances of their experiences. A qualitative approach employed interviews with twelve Deaf employees, purposively sampled from the community. The findings paint a complex picture. While overall relations appear positive, a stark gender disparity emerges in workplace power dynamics and opportunities. Deaf males enjoy greater autonomy, wield influence and navigate responsibilities relatively easily. Deaf women, however, encounter discriminatory practices, are often excluded from crucial decision-making processes and professional engagements. This study underscores the urgent need for concrete measures to combat workplace gender bias and empower Deaf females. Business institutions must prioritize equal opportunities for employment, training, and development by fostering inclusive work environments and providing targeted support for Deaf females. Such findings provide an in-depth understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by Deaf employees, particularly navigating the complexities of gender dynamics within the professional sphere. Further research is warranted to explore effective strategies for fostering equitable and empowering workplaces for Deaf individuals of all genders, ultimately promoting their successful integration into the Saudi labour market.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54660/IJMRGE.2024.5.3.288-297>

Keywords: Deaf employees, job empowerment, labour market

Introduction

Work plays a fundamental role in disabled individuals' lives, including the Deaf ^[1]. It serves as a gateway to financial independence, personal & professional fulfilment, and a sense of societal contribution (Winzer and Mazurek, 2017) ^[35]. Yet, despite widespread recognition of its importance, numerous challenges hinder the effective inclusion of Deaf individuals in the workforce, limiting their ability to reach their full potential. Indeed, Deaf individuals face barriers to accessing employment, including a lack of career advice in sign language, limited opportunities for advancement, absence of deaf role models, and issues of accessibility and inclusion in the workplace, according to the Royal Association of the Deaf (RAD) (2021) ^[34].

In Saudi Arabia, this reality becomes particularly apparent. Recent studies have shed light on the obstacles faced by Deaf employees in the labour market (Alajlan, 2023; Al-Shahrani and Al-Ghamdi, 2020) ^[1, 6]. While employers may express positive attitudes towards hiring them, concerns surrounding productivity, health, and technological proficiency often cloud their decisions. Furthermore, discriminatory practices, limited career guidance in sign language, and a lack of deaf role models contribute to a culture of exclusion and hinder professional advancement.

However, amidst these challenges, glimmers of hope exist. Building on research like Martono *et al.* (2020) ^[25], this study delves

¹ Capitalizing 'Deaf' signifies cultural identity for Deaf community adults, often due to early hearing loss. They often share a common language (e.g., sign language), history, values, and experiences.

deeper into the connection between empowering leadership and employee creativity.

Analysing data from 220 bank employees, it reveals that empowering leadership directly and indirectly boosts creativity through increased motivation to learn, trust in leaders, and confidence in one's creative abilities (creative self-efficacy). Job empowerment initiatives designed to equip Deaf individuals with necessary skills and provide appropriate support have proven effective in increasing their chances of securing suitable employment and fostering self-reliance (Belknap *et al.*, 2019) ^[9]. In this context, Guambe (2016) ^[15] investigated the empowering potential of cooperatives for disabled people, focusing on the Zamani Disabled People's Organization (ZDPO). Through a census survey of all 50 members, the study revealed that cooperatives empower individuals through democratic participation in decision-making, capacity building, and management satisfaction. Such initiatives, aligned with global trends in disability inclusion (Hwang and Yoo, 2017) ^[18], could potentially enhance the quality of life for Deaf individuals in Saudi Arabia to a significant extent.

This in-depth study delves into the lived experiences of Deaf employees in Jeddah, a major economic hub within the Kingdom. Using a qualitative approach and interviews with a purposive sample, the study seeks to answer a crucial question: 'What is the current reality of job empowerment for Deaf employees in the Jeddah labour market?' By unearthing their perspectives, insights, and challenges, this study aims to illuminate the barriers they face and the potential pathways towards meaningful and empowered employment.

By shedding light on the current state of job empowerment for Deaf employees in Jeddah, this study attempts to contribute to both academic and practical discourse. The findings will offer valuable insights to researchers, policymakers, and employers, informing the development of strategies and targeted interventions that promote effective inclusion and empower Deaf individuals to access their full potential within the Saudi labour market.

Literature review

Job empowerment for Deaf individuals: A global perspective

Global efforts to advance Deaf employment rights are multifaceted. Governments and human rights organizations actively bolster legislation and regulations protecting equal opportunities (O'Reilly, 2007) ^[29]. They implement incentivizing programs to encourage employers to hire individuals with disabilities (Al-Khalidi, 2023) ^[2]. These initiatives aim to empower Deaf individuals in the workplace, leveraging their diverse skills and perspectives to foster innovation, competitiveness, and career advancement (Al-Khalidi, 2023) ^[2].

Despite global efforts, legal protections and national strategies, obstacles to workplace empowerment persist in many countries around world. Nagtegaal *et al.* (2023) ^[28] conducted a systematic review to identify factors that influence employers' decisions to hire people with disabilities. They found that employers' decisions are influenced by 32 factors, mostly acting as barriers. Employers' negative expectations about productivity, cost, and insufficient disability knowledge were the most common hurdles. Importantly, factor impact varies depending on context, including organization type, disability type, and policies.

In Malaysia, Deaf individuals struggle with low employment rates. Rahman *et al.* (2021) ^[30] explored this issue through interviews with job coaches and the Deaf Society president, identifying several key barriers: a multitude of employment barriers, including financially undervalued positions, inaccessible workplaces, communication hurdles due to limited sign language fluency, and even reported bullying experiences. Additionally, personal factors like negative attitudes and job preference limitations can hinder their placement and retention. McKinney and Swartz (2019) ^[26] investigated the experiences of South Africans with diverse disabilities, including Deaf individuals, during the job application process. Participants (n=72) reported encountering inaccessible job postings, unclear requirements, and discrimination during disability disclosure. These findings illuminate the crucial need for inclusive application processes and policies that foster open communication about disability.

Limited awareness and support further hinder Deaf employment possibilities. Cruz and Calimpusan (2018) ^[13] identify low employment rates and limited entrepreneurial opportunities as key challenges encountered by Deaf individuals in Butuan City, Philippines. Their study analyses education, networks, and Deaf identity as vital community roles but reveals insufficient accessibility (lack of sign language interpreters) and communication challenges as barriers to thriving in the private sector.

Deaf bloggers' voices also illuminate persistent societal and workplace challenges. Hamill and Stein (2011) ^[16] analyse posts from Deafnation blog, capturing frustrations and concerns about the community's status and inequality. Notably, 59% of empowerment posts expressed these anxieties. However, the study also identifies diverse community empowerment strategies across work, knowledge sharing, member engagement, and social justice advocacy. Deafnation voices resonate with calls for action, building bridges through accessibility and community strength.

Further challenges emerge from Rydberg's (2010) ^[31] study comparing a large sample of Deaf individuals (n= 2,144) in Sweden to the general population. While educational reforms aimed to improve equity, Deaf individuals still experienced lower educational attainment, limited access to high-paying jobs, and lower overall income. Additionally, they were more likely to be overqualified for their positions, suggesting underutilization of their skills and potential. This emphasizes the need for career advancement opportunities and initiatives that address potential bias and discrimination in the Swedish labour market.

These studies, though geographically distinct, highlight the continuing struggle for equitable employment opportunities faced by Deaf individuals. Addressing the multifaceted challenges they encounter requires multifaceted solutions, encompassing inclusive recruitment practices, skills development programs, and supportive workplace environments. Only then can the full potential of Deaf individuals be harnessed and contribute to a more inclusive and diverse workforce globally.

The Saudi context

Mirroring the growing global attention to disability rights, Saudi Arabia has witnessed significant efforts to empower individuals with disabilities. One such area of focus is employment inclusion, particularly since the launch of Saudi Vision 2030 (Al-Khalidi, 2023) ^[2]. Initiatives like the

‘Tawafuq Programme’ by the Human Resources Development Fund aim to equip and support people with disabilities for private sector jobs (Alajlan, 2023) ^[1].

Despite these commendable efforts, the reality of job empowerment for individuals with disabilities, especially the Deaf community, remains complex. Among the 669,874 working-age individuals with disabilities in Saudi Arabia in 2017, only 4.8% of men and 8% of women were employed. The situation for Deaf individuals was even more challenging, with their employment rate estimated at less than 1% of the total workforce (Al-Turki, 2017) ^[8]. Studies by Al-Ajlan (2023) ^[1] and Al-Shahrani and Al-Ghamdi (2020) ^[6] highlight persisting challenges. While employers might express positive attitudes, concerns over productivity, health issues, and even technology misuse often cloud their hiring decisions. Similarly, negative cultural attitudes and inadequate educational and training opportunities, as emphasized by Issa (2014) ^[21], pose further hurdles for Deaf individuals. These findings resonate with a broader global picture, underlining the need for continued research and action.

Jeddah, as a vibrant and economically significant city with an active Deaf community, presents a compelling context for further investigation. This study, therefore, delves deeper into the workplace experiences of Deaf employees in Jeddah, specifically focusing on their challenges and experiences in job placement. By addressing the research question: ‘What is the reality of job empowerment for Deaf employees in the labour market in Jeddah?’, the study seeks to close the gap

between existing policies and programs and enhance job empowerment for Deaf individuals in major Saudi Arabian cities.

Methods

Participants

Twelve Deaf employees participated in the study. Table 1 details Deaf participants’ demographic characteristics, who were purposefully selected from government and private sectors in Jeddah. The participants’ diverse backgrounds, reflecting careful selection across the city (Hennink, *et al.*, 2020) ^[17], enabled the study to capture a nuanced understanding of barriers faced by Deaf workers, varying with, education, years of experience, age, and gender. The majority (66.7%) are aged 37-53, and most only hold a high school education (41.7%). Notably, half the remaining participants have either a secondary certificate or diploma (16.7% each). Eight (66.7%) participants have four or more years of experience; while the remaining participants have equal proportions of experience between one to two years and two to three years, each representing (16.7%) of the group. Both genders were represented in office jobs requiring basic writing, organization, and communication skills. Notably, half the females served as administrative assistants, while one male worked directly with the Deaf community as an education consultant. However, a discrepancy emerged as participants from both genders (50%) found themselves in roles differing from their intended fields.

Table 1: Employees’ demographic characteristics

Characteristics	n	Parentage (%)
Deaf employees’	12	100
Gender		
Male	8	66.66
Female	4	33.33
Deaf distribution by age		
24-36	3	25
37-41	4	33.33
42-53	4	33.33
54-60	1	8.33
Educational qualification		
Secondary	2	16.7
High school	5	41.7
Bachelor	2	16.7
Diploma	2	16.7
Postgraduate	1	8.33
Type of the job		
Government sector	9	75
Private sector	3	25
Years of professional experience		
1-2 years	2	16.7
2-3 years	2	16.7
3-4 years	0	0
4 years and more	8	66.7
Job title		
Administrative	1	8.33
Secretary	1	8.33
Treasurer	1	8.33
Postal operations officer	1	8.33
Administrative assistant	2	16.7
Deaf education consultant	1	8.33
Information recorder	2	16.7
Data transcriber	1	8.33
Undisclosed	1	8.33

Work matches with job specification		
Yes	5	41.6
No	6	50.0
Sometimes	1	8.33
Total		

Data collection

To delve deeper into participants' experiences, the researchers crafted an in-depth semi-structured interview format, which minimizes potential bias (Al-Qurini, 2020) [4]. This approach balanced flexibility with focus, drawing upon insights from the literature review and the study's objectives. The semi-structured interview's topic guide is displayed in table 2. Strengthening the interview's validity and reliability, the researchers also presented the questions to (11) expert arbitrators and incorporated their feedback. A pilot study with three Deaf individuals (two males, one female) further confirmed the interview's effectiveness before full implementation (In, 2017). To ensure the utmost accuracy in information gathering, the semi-structured interview schedule was translated into Saudi Sign Language (SaudiSL) by 6 (2 females and 4 males) skilled interpreters who facilitated the communication, and they were chosen by the Deaf participants. This decision considered the potential variations in sign language proficiency, experience, and interaction skills among interpreters (Sheppard, 2011) [32].

Aligned with the study's goals, the interview spanned two sections: demographics and 26 in-depth questions exploring job empowerment realities and attitudes among Deaf employees. Adhering to the participants' expressed desire for non-recording, the researchers conducted one-hour, individual face-to-face interviews and compiled detailed written records of the responses to guarantee data integrity. Leveraging the networks of the Deaf Club and Emkan Association, researchers identified participants. After providing thorough written information regarding the study's methods and targets to the participants, interviews were held at times and locations best suited to each participant's needs. Securing Deaf participants consent, researchers presented the study details and informed consent form, emphasizing the participants' right to withdraw at any point.

Table 2: Schedule of semi-structured interview - topic guide

Topics
Personal and professional background
▪ Gender
▪ Age
▪ Educational qualification
▪ Type of job
▪ Years of professional experience
▪ Job title
▪ Whether work matches with job specification
The reality of job empowerment for Deaf individuals in the labour market in Jeddah
▪ Authority to work
▪ Teamwork
▪ Motivation
▪ Career development and advancement opportunities

Data analysis

Deaf employees' job empowerment experiences and attitudes were explored. The current study used qualitative and descriptive statistical analysis - through frequency ratios to facilitate understanding the data - to analyse the interviews'

results using a mixed-methods approach, combining thematic and content analysis, which allows the researcher to explore recurring patterns across their data (Billups, 2021) [10]. This ensured a nuanced understanding of the data, particularly cultural aspects relevant to the Saudi context. Deaf participants' responses were systematically coded, categorized, and translated to capture key themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006) [12].

Respondent validation was employed to maintain data integrity (Birt, *et al.*, 2016) [11], involving a review of participants' interview responses facilitated by sign language interpreters. Further validating the findings, the results were presented to experienced researchers for independent review and evaluation, minimizing bias and ensuring an accurate reflection of participants' voices. This process, known as researcher triangulation (Al-Saadi, 2018) [5], strengthened the study's credibility. Participants were assigned pseudonyms for anonymity.

Findings and discussion

This qualitative study delves into the complexities of job empowerment for Deaf individuals in Jeddah's labor market. Employing a framework centered on four key dimensions – autonomy, collaboration, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and career progression – the research offers a nuanced understanding of their lived experiences. Each dimension is further explored through relevant sub-themes, illuminating the challenges and opportunities Deaf individuals navigate in their pursuit of workplace empowerment.

Authority to work

Delegation of authority

This study highlights the precariousness of job empowerment for Deaf individuals in Jeddah's labour market, particularly regarding autonomy in work performance. Male participants' work authority varied within their jobs. While 3 (37.5%) felt they had moderate power ('half the work, simple duties'), others like Al-Baraa, a private consultant, enjoyed high authority: 'I have very great powers in my work as a consultant in the Deaf field, and I have many tasks, including being a director'. This appears linked to organizational structures, job types, and policies, rather than the limitations identified by McKinney and Swartz (2019) [26] which attributed low integration across sectors to inadequate support from agencies and institutions.

Notably, all four (100%) female participants lacked any power delegation within their government or private sector roles. Zubaida, a government employee, confirmed: 'My employer took me on loan for several months, the work here is chaos, there is nothing organised, and there is no ... I am not authorized to do anything.' This discrepancy warrants potentially linked to organizational bias against Deaf employees may limit their access to positions with inherent authority or opportunities for delegation; lack of confidence in employee capabilities due to employers' apprehension about Deaf individuals' skills or communication abilities could impede delegation and trust; and inadequate accessibility tools and support systems, along with the

absence of proper communication or assistive technology might create hurdles in delegating tasks effectively. The stark contrast between male and female participants' experiences suggests potential gendered dimensions of workplace discrimination against Deaf individuals. Further research could explore these nuances and the intersection of disability with gender within the context of job empowerment.

Limited agency and restricted participation

This study exposes the stark contrast in agency and freedom to work experienced by Deaf individuals in the Jeddah labour market. Male participants' experiences varied. Three (37.5%) of them enjoyed significant autonomy, Al-Baraa, a private consultant, indicated: 'Since I am primarily responsible for the Deaf in the entity, I work for, they gave me the freedom to solve the difficulties they encountered.' This likely stems from job nature, position level, and organizational culture, aligned with Martono *et al.* (2020) ^[25] who found job empowerment increases work outcomes and creativity.

However, two (50%) female participants faced significant restrictions in their ability to partake in problem-solving and decision-making, as Rahma, a fictitious employee² in a private sector, indicated: 'I do not have the freedom to solve problems because of my fake work,' while Zubaida, a governmental employee: 'I am given freedom to a certain degree as a result of the lack of clarity in the system in my workplace, also because I am on a loan system and it is not official.' This likely stems from lack of clear policies and procedures and a lack of genuine opportunities for Deaf employees, possibly due to prejudice or biases as well as exploitative 'fake employment', which limits genuine participation in the workforce.

Unequal access to clarification from authority figures

This study reveals a significant gender gap in access to clarification of work authority and goals for Deaf employees in Jeddah's labour market. While over 60% (5) of the male participants reported 'very excellent' or 'high' satisfaction with receiving clear instructions, 37.5% (3) of them rated it between 'medium'. Deaf males encountered varied methods for understanding their work authority. Al-Zubair, a government employee, indicated: 'I received written explanations', mentioned that: 'my manager informs me of my work powers through a sign language translator. However, Talha, a government employee faced hurdles: 'My manager's weak sign language forces me to involve a colleague for clarification, or even an interpreter if unavailable'. This highlights a broader lack of awareness about Deaf communication preferences.

On the contrary, none of the female participants 4 (25%) received any explanation from their supervisors. Inaccurate or non-existent job descriptions for Deaf staff can lead to confusion and frustration, as they lack essential information on their authority, accountability, and expected outcomes. As Zubaida, a government employee, expressed angrily: 'My manager is always dissatisfied, her treatment is bad, and she has no true intention to explain anything, and her instructions are not very clear, so my work cannot be done clearly, as I

alone do my work along with that of others'. This discrepancy suggests potential gendered discrimination or systemic neglect of Deaf female employees' needs.

Uneven workload distribution

A stark disparity in workload distribution emerged within this study, highlighting limitations in job empowerment for Deaf individuals in Jeddah's labour market. All female participants (100%) reported being burdened with 'simple' and repetitive tasks like photocopying, while their hearing colleagues enjoyed more 'important' and meaningful work. Yasmine's, a government employee, statement, 'Only Deaf people get trivial jobs like monitoring students, while hearing employees handle real responsibilities,' exemplifies this sentiment. Zubaida further emphasized the issue, mentioning 'undefined and overlapping tasks' that leave them 'confused and undervalued.' This aligns with Alajlan's (2023) ^[1] observations on concerns surrounding employing individuals with disabilities, often leading to restricted and menial work roles.

While male employees experienced generally more favourable tasks, (37.5%) expressed dissatisfaction with the unfairness of responsibilities. Talha, a government employee, describes his manager's email communication: 'The president sends the delegated authorities via email, but after receiving the email I face difficulty and have to turn to my coworker and he explains the information to me until I understand it.' This suggests potential communication barriers and implicit bias against Deaf individuals by some managers, corroborating Yusof *et al.*'s (2012) ^[36] findings that communication significantly impacts the functional limitations of Deaf individuals in the workplace.

Limited agency in decision-making

This study reveals a striking disparity in participation and oversight of decision-making for Deaf employees in Jeddah's labor market. While male participants' experiences varied, half (50%) expressed frustration with a lack of clear decision-making processes or meaningful involvement. Obaid, a government employee, stated, "Decisions happen behind closed doors; I have no say." This aligns with Michael's (2019) ^[27] findings of limited autonomy for Deaf individuals in workplace decision-making. Notably, all female participants (100%) reported minimal to no involvement in significant decision-making, further highlighting the existence of gendered dimensions to workplace inclusion. Zubaydah, a government employee, exemplified this sentiment, stating, 'I have no authority to make decisions. My routine job does not involve it.' This disparity hints at potential factors like lack of trust in Deaf employees' abilities, centralized decision-making structures, or job roles not requiring independent decision-making.

Monitoring the decisions of the Deaf employee

Participants reported varied levels of decision oversight. Half (4 males, 2 females) experienced frequent checks. As Al-Zubair, a government employee, described: 'My manager monitors my decisions one to two times daily.' However, two females reported moderate oversight, finding it inconsistent

2 "Fake employment" refers to the deceptive practice of hiring people with disabilities without expecting them to perform actual work, requiring them to work minimal hours, or significantly underpaying them. This fraudulent scheme exploits Saudization quotas for private companies, allowing them to

comply with regulations without truly integrating individuals with disabilities into their workforce.

between managers and supervisors. Yasmine, a government employee, elaborated: 'Oversight varies, coming from managers, agents, or supervisors, sometimes lacking complete understanding of our work.' This variation could stem from the importance of supervision for quality, performance, and risk management, or potentially reflect a lack of confidence in Deaf employees' abilities, which can negatively impact their satisfaction and autonomy. Notably, these findings align with Guambe's (2016) ^[15] study, which highlighted the importance of disabled individuals' involvement in decision-making and ensuring work opportunities utilize their full potential.

Teamwork

Fostering collaboration

Deaf male participants' experiences with supervisor encouragement for collaboration differed from those of their hearing counterparts. Over 60% (5) felt strongly encouraged, citing supportive work cultures and managers who facilitated cooperation. Al-Zubair, a government employee, exemplified this: 'My manager always advises my colleagues to cooperate with me.' This contrasts with McKinney's and Swartz's (2019) ^[26] findings of colleague-related challenges for disabled employees, including communication barriers, bias, and lack of acceptance.

All females (4) and a quarter of the males (2) reported minimal or no supervisor encouragement for teamwork with hearing colleagues. Talha, a government employee, described the inconsistent landscape: 'Work styles vary across departments, but nowhere did I encounter managers promoting teamwork.' Yasmine, a government employee, echoed this, highlighting task segregation: 'Hearing colleagues consistently handle different tasks, leaving us largely excluded from collaboration, except for public events.' These experiences suggest a potential lack of workplace inclusivity, communication hurdles with managers, or limited acceptance of deaf work styles. This aligns with Kavin and Brown-Kurz (2008) ^[22] findings of communication challenges and information access barriers impacting career paths for deaf employees.

Navigating view exchange

Participants' responses on exchanging views with hearing colleagues showcased diverse experiences. While some actively shared perspectives and felt confident in this interaction, others harbored negative attitudes and lacked confidence. Interestingly, (37.5%) of males reported moderate view exchange, like Al-Zubair, a government employee, who said, 'We discuss work-related matters.' This partially contradicts Kavin and Brown-Kurz (2008) ^[22] suggesting communication barriers and information access challenges for Deaf employees, impacting careers. However, only two (25%) males and two (50%) females reported minimal exchange. Some, like Yasser, a government employee, felt exploited, stating, 'My hearing colleagues benefit by learning sign language but rarely teach me anything.' This disparity might stem from negative perceptions or lack of accessible communication channels, unlike Foster's and Macleod's (2003) ^[14] study praising diverse methods for better Deaf-hearing interaction.

Nevertheless, two (50%) female participants actively exchanged viewpoints with hearing colleagues, like Yasmine, government employee, who said, 'We constantly swap opinions, I sit with them, talk, and seek their advice, and

they do the same.' This discrepancy might be explained by the flexible, collaborative culture.

A disparate landscape

This study reveals a complex and often contradictory landscape regarding hearing colleagues' attitudes towards Deaf employees in Jeddah's workplaces. Five (75%) of male participants reported positive and supportive attitudes, exemplified by Yasser's, a government employee, statement, 'My colleagues encourage me to succeed in my tasks'. This likely stems from his proven skills and established presence, fostering acceptance and understanding. However, two (25%) male participants encountered negativity and prejudice. Al-Baraa's, a private sector employee, experience, 'Some colleagues outside my department hold prejudiced views about my work, impacting even my promotion. Someone claimed I was not 'fit' due to my deafness,' highlights the existence of persisting biases and limited awareness about Deaf individuals' capabilities in the broader community.

However, female participants painted a starker picture, with most encountering negative attitudes and skepticism from hearing female colleagues specifically within the context of assuming job positions. Naila's statement, 'I feel like a token hire ... they do not want me to work, just to boost their Saudization numbers.' underscores this sense of tokenism and marginalization. This gendered dimension of workplace inclusion for Deaf individuals demands further investigation and targeted interventions.

Motivation

Unequal motivators

All females (100%) and half of the males (50%) reported receiving no work-related incentives, neither moral nor material. This led to widespread feelings of discrimination against Deaf employees compared to hearing colleagues. As Yasmine, a government worker, stated, 'There's simply no incentive for Deaf employees, everything, like training, conferences, and promotions, goes to hearing employees, it's frankly unfair.' This disparity can be attributed to several factors: employer unawareness of the capabilities of Deaf individuals, the importance of equal opportunities, and entrenched social discrimination against disabilities. These findings align with Nagtegaal's *et al.* (2023) ^[28] study, which confirmed discrimination and bias faced in the workplace by disabled people.

In contrast, half of the males (50%) reported receiving various incentives, including financial rewards, gifts, training courses, and certificates of honor. This disparity suggests employers' awareness of Deaf employees' potential, as Obaid, a government employee, noted, 'The administration treats us equally to hearing employees, even giving us annual bonuses.' This aligns with Cruz's and Calimpusan's (2018) ^[13] study, highlighting the importance of employer awareness in empowering Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals in their place of work.

Perceived injustice

Despite half of the males receiving incentives, all female participants (100%) perceived unfairness in the incentives offered to Deaf employees compared to hearing colleagues. They felt ignored for individual abilities and treated as merely disabled. Al-Baraa, a private sector employee, stated, 'The labour market views deafness as a disability, not a strength,

incentives are unfair, prioritizing hearing employees based on a false medical assumption.' Yasser, a government employee, echoed this: 'I receive no incentives, while hearing colleagues get rewards for their work.' This result is aligning with Kim *et al.*'s (2018) [23] findings on the lack of opportunities and empowerment faced by Deaf workers.

Divergent perceptions of the promotion system

Across genders, participants perceive the promotion system starkly differently. A striking (66.7%) hold negative attitudes, citing diverse concerns: Participants expressed these trends in different ways. For example, Al-Baraa, a private sector employee, mentioned: 'My work is self-financing, so there are no bonuses or promotions.' Negativity towards promotions likely arises from a mix of factors: different jobs, unclear processes, and possible bias based on perceived skills or communication barriers. Rahman's *et al.*, (2021) [30] and Rydberg's (2010) [31] study corroborates these findings, highlighting low wages as another material obstacle Deaf individuals face in the workplace.

Among male participants, a lone (25%) expressed satisfaction with the promotion system, citing its transparency and accessibility. Firas, a government employee, beamed: 'Fair evaluations happen every four years, open to everyone.' These positive responses suggest transparency and equal opportunities in their workplaces. This finding diverges from Al-Shakrawi's and Al-Awadi's (2016) [7] study, which highlighted workplace discrimination and mismatched job placements for Deaf individuals.

Lack of flexibility at work

Most Deaf employees (66.7%) (4 males and 4 females) in this study expressed dissatisfaction with the flexibility offered in their workplaces. They faced numerous barriers, including limited task selection, unequal treatment compared to hearing colleagues, and even surveillance through assigned hearing employees. Yasmine, a government worker, summarized the issue: 'There is no freedom to choose tasks or work independently, they allow me very simple things, although outside of work I contributed to the service of Deaf people despite the struggles I faced.' This lack of flexibility may stem from societal discrimination or employer ignorance about Deaf capabilities, leading to underestimation of their skills and potential. This aligns with Al-Shahrani's and Al-Ghamdi's (2020) [6] findings on workplace obstacles hindering Deaf career advancement, such as discrimination and neglect, which negatively impact self-confidence and professional development.

Not all experiences; however, were negative. Four males (50%) reported high levels of flexibility, attributing it to factors like clear task allocation and supportive work environments. Khalil, another government employee, said: 'I have a high degree of freedom at work, my tasks are clear and specific, which helps me excel.' This highlights the importance of employer awareness and inclusive work cultures in empowering Deaf employees and recognizing their full potential. This study's finding on employee flexibility contradicts Kim *et al.* (2018) [23], which focused on Deaf workers' general job entry challenges.

Disparities in trust for Deaf employees

Male participants expressed significantly higher confidence (75%) from their superiors compared to female (25%). Al-Baraa, a private sector employee, exemplified this, stating,

'My boss empowered me with major tasks like Deaf policy development, leading to international awards.' This result is in line with Martono's *et al.* (2020) [25] study that confirmed how job empowerment improves employee performance and creativity. Zubaida, a government employee, contrasted this, saying, 'My manager shows minimal trust, even for simple tasks.' This disparity may reflect employer perceptions of Deaf employees' capabilities, individual workplace cultures, and commitment to empowering diverse employees.

Career development and advancement opportunities Unequal opportunities of professional training for Deaf employees

Participants' experiences with vocational training differed significantly by gender. Only a few (12.5% males, 25% females) had received pre-employment training. Al-Baraa, a private sector employee, explained, 'My only training was overseas during my Master's studies.' Limited local training options, lack of accessibility, and potential employer undervaluing of training likely explain the low pre-employment training numbers. Conversely, half of the males (50%) and a quarter of the females (25%) received training after joining their jobs. Job-based training suggests employer recognition of its value for performance and specific skills. This aligns with Knight *et al.* (2021) [24], who found targeted vocational training to be crucial for career empowerment and workplace adaptation for deaf individuals.

Despite some post-job training, three participants (1 males, 2 females) received no training at all. Yasmine, a government employee, explained, 'The director did not allow to enlist in training, saying it is useless without interpreters.' Yasser, a government employee, echoed this, stating, 'For 34 years, my manager has not offered any training courses.' This suggests a lack of employer awareness regarding Deaf employees' rights, capabilities, and communication needs. This aligns with Hlatywayo and Ncube (2014) [19], who highlighted the importance of training for deaf employees to enhance their employment and skillset.

Unveiling the inequities in training encouragement for Deaf employees

There is a variation in training encouragement for male participants (high to very low), most (.50%) reported no or minimal benefit due to accessibility barriers. Al-Baraa, a private sector employee, explained, 'Employers encourage training, but offer no viable training for Deaf employees. There are no interpreters, no suitable materials, my leadership training was pointless without an interpreter.' Obaid, a government employee, added, 'Deaf employees are verbally informed about training, unlike hearing colleagues who receive email announcements, this lack of clear information makes it difficult to access training opportunities.' These findings align with Sudiatmaka *et al.* (2020) [33] highlighting the lack of training access as a disability rights violation and identifying training deficiencies as a major barrier to career advancement for disabled employees.

All female participants (100%) reported a lack of training encouragement for Deaf women specifically. Zubaida, a government employee, exemplifies this: 'No training or development for Deaf women here in Jeddah, they encourage attending workshops in Riyadh and Taif, but not here.' This suggests limited awareness about training opportunities among both Deaf employees and employers who may lack understanding of the Deaf community's needs and support

required for effective training. This aligns with Knight *et al.* (2021) [24], highlighting training, vocational guidance, and accessible sign language resources as crucial for career development and workplace adaptation for deaf individuals.

Navigating the spectrum of training equality for Deaf employees

While half of the male participants reported feeling high to very high equality with hearing colleagues during training, Al-Zubair, a government employee, highlights the inclusive approach of institutions offering separate training with interpreter support, stating, “There is no difference in training access for Deaf and hearing individuals.” This contrasts with the challenges highlighted by Al-Shahrani and Al-Ghamdi (2020) [6], who found Deaf individuals facing discrimination and neglected by institutional training, thereby, hindering their career advancement.

While three male participants (37.5%) reported high equality in training, a stark contrast emerged among female participants, with 3 (75%) experiencing significant inequality compared to hearing colleagues. As Talha, a government employee, stated, ‘In Riyadh, training equality existed. Unfortunately, Jeddah offers none. Everything is for the hearing.’ This disparity points to Jeddah institutions potentially lacking resources or understanding of Deaf individuals’ needs (interpreters, support, training rights). Limited, expensive interpreters exacerbate the issue. Aligning with Al-Shakrawi and Al-Awadi (2016) [7], these findings expose the ongoing battle people with disabilities face. Discrimination and unsuitable job access hinder their path to career empowerment.

The interpreter scarcity in training for Deaf employees

Deaf participants’ experiences paint a stark picture of interpreter deficiency within vocational training. All female participants (100%) and over a third of the males (37.5%) reported a complete absence of interpreters during courses. Obaid, a government employee, captures the frustration: ‘While hearing colleagues learn freely, we struggle to grasp the content without interpreters. I would have to bring my own, at my own cost. In contrast, three male participants (37.5%) mentioned occasional interpreter availability, albeit inconsistent. Firas, another government employee, shares: ‘My employer offers interpreters, but not always. Sometimes, there is no interpreter and I rely on screen presentations.’ This result is due to the lack of interpreter mandate, scarce resources, low awareness, leaving training muted for many Deaf individuals.

The benefits of both genders from institutional training for Deaf employees

Six (75%) of the males saw significant benefits from training, with all reporting ‘very high’ or ‘high’ impact. Firas, a government employee, added: ‘I benefited from the training and workshops by 90% because they are important and promotions helped me.’ This suggests some institutions are realizing the value of training for Deaf employees. This finding aligns with Al-Madi and Al-Shinaifi (2021) [3], who argue that employee training’s ability to enhance skills and cognition makes it the key driver of job empowerment. However, a contrast emerges for females; all four found no benefit. Zubaida, a government employee, stated: ‘There was not much benefit from the training due to the absence of a sign language interpreter.’ This highlights a potential lack of

institutional awareness about training’s importance for all employees, regardless of disability, and a failure to recognize their abilities and potential.

Vocational training aids

The responses of male and female participants varied regarding the methods used in vocational training. Table 3 summarizes the most important of these methods based on the participants’ gender.

Table 3: Aids in vocational training

The method used	Sex	
	Male (n)	Female (n)
Sign language interpreter	1	0
PowerPoint presentations	3	0
Internet	1	0
The board	0	1
Writing	3	1
Copywriter	1	0
Photo	1	0
Computer	2	0
Plates and instructions	1	0
No method was used	2	2

Table (3) reveals a clear difference in training methods preferred by Deaf males and females. PowerPoint presentations dominated for males, while they entirely avoided the blackboard. Talha, a government employee, exemplifies this: ‘Writing is used by most trainers, but I understand the information late and have to ask my friend for clarification.’ Conversely, females relied heavily on blackboards and written materials. This suggests a lack of consideration for sign language interpreters in institutional training for Deaf employees. Such neglect implies a training process misaligned with the needs and skills of Deaf individuals, hindering their ability to benefit and gain functional empowerment.

Conclusion

This study highlighted the persistent disparities faced by Deaf employees in the Saudi labour market, highlighting the urgent need for concerted action towards a more inclusive and empowering work environment. While significant challenges remain, particularly with regards to communication barriers, discriminatory practices, and unclear organizational policies, the potential for positive change is evident.

To bridge the gap and empower Deaf employees, a multi-pronged approach is essential. Mandatory interpreter support is a crucial first step, ensuring access to clear and effective communication. This should be coupled with the development and provision of accessible training materials catered to Deaf learning styles and preferences. Further, organizations must cultivate a culture of clear and open communication with Deaf employees, actively seeking their input and feedback. Addressing internal biases and implementing diversity and inclusion training for all employees is also critical in fostering a more welcoming and supportive work environment.

Targeted interventions should focus on equipping Deaf employees with the necessary skills and tools for success. Skills training programs tailored to Deaf learners, in collaboration with disability service providers, can bridge skill gaps and enhance employability. Accessible communication tools such as video conferencing technology

and live captioning systems can further streamline communication and participation. Importantly, organizations should provide opportunities for leadership development and decision-making participation for Deaf employees, recognizing their valuable contributions and fostering a sense of ownership and empowerment.

Further research is vital to refine and evaluate the effectiveness of these interventions in promoting equitable work experiences and career advancement for Deaf employees. Longitudinal studies examining the impact of various strategies on retention, promotion rates, and overall job satisfaction would provide valuable insights for future implementations. By investing in research and implementing evidence-based practices, organizations can optimize their efforts towards creating inclusive and empowering work environments for all employees, regardless of ability.

This study underscores the importance of collaborative efforts across academia, the business sector, and disability service providers. By sharing knowledge, expertise, and resources, these stakeholders can create a powerful force for positive change. Building a truly inclusive labour market in Saudi Arabia requires a sustained commitment to dismantling barriers, promoting awareness, and empowering Deaf individuals to reach their full potential. This study serves as a call to action, urging all stakeholders to take concrete steps towards a future where Deaf employees can thrive and contribute their unique talents to the Saudi workforce.

Funding: The authors received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

Acknowledgments: The authors would like to thank the Deaf employees for taking time to share their experiences.

Ethics declaration: Authors declared that the ethics approval was granted by the Faculty of Education in King Abdulaziz University Human Research Ethics Committee (H-2018-0070) to conduct this research.

Disclosure statement: No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Data availability: Data generated or analysed during this study are available from the authors on request.

References

- Alajlan MI. Employment of People with Disabilities in the Private Sector: Ethnographic Qualitative Study. *Information Sciences Letters*. 2023;12(5):2261-2178.
- Al-Khaldi AA. Obstacles to the Employment of Visually Impaired Individuals in the Saudi Private Sector in the Al-Madinah Region. *Journal of Educational Psychology and Sciences*. 2023;16(1):1-35. Available from: <https://jeps.qu.edu.sa/index.php/jep/article/view/2536/2564>
- Al-Madi AB, Al-Shinaifi NI. Functional Empowerment and Its Impact on Job Satisfaction. *Arab Journal of Management*. 2021;14(4):313-338. <https://doi.org/10.21608/AJA.2021.207055>
- Al-Qurini S. *Qualitative Research: Strategies and Data Analysis*. King Saud University Publishing House; c2020.
- Al-Saadi AB. The Role of Triangulation Strategy in Enhancing Scientific Research in the Field of Educational Technology. *International Special Education Journal*. 2018;7(9):68-78.
- Al-Shahrani FB, Al-Ghamdi MB. The Role of Governmental and Private Institutions in Empowering Deaf Individuals in Abha City: An Applied Study on a Sample of Deaf Employees in Those Institutions. *Journal of College of Arts and Humanities*. 2020;1441(1):1-60.
- Al-Shakrawi AH, Al-Awadi FA. The international legal basis for guarantees of the rights of persons with disabilities. *Al-Muhaqiq Al-Hilli Journal of Legal and Political Sciences*. 2016;8(1):10-43.
- Al-Turki YS. A Study of the Content Analysis Methodology for the First and Second Arabic Sign Language Dictionaries for the Phonological (Sound) System in Arabic Sign Language for the Deaf. *Journal of Islamic University Education and Psychological Studies*. 2017;25(4):1-23. <https://doi-org.sdl.idm.oclc.org/10.12816/0048293>
- Belknap PJ, Korwin KA, Long NM. Job Coaching: A Means to Reduce Unemployment and Underemployment in the Deaf Community. *Journal of Applied Deaf Studies and Rehabilitation*. 2019;28(4):21-38. Available from: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/234959721.pdf>
- Billups FD. *Qualitative Data Collection Tools: Design, Development, and Applications*. SAGE; c2021.
- Birt L, Scott S, Cavers D, Campbell C, Walter F. Member Checking: A Tool to Enhance Trustworthiness or Merely a Nod to Validation? *Qualitative Health Research*. 2016;26(13):1802-1811. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316654870>
- Braun V, Clarke V. Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*. 2006;3(2):77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Cruz F, Calimpusan E. Status and Challenges of the Deaf in One City in the Philippines: Towards the Development of Support Systems and Socio-economic Opportunities. *Asia Pacific Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*. 2018;6(2):33-47.
- Foster S, MacLeod J. Deaf People at Work: Assessment of Communication among Deaf and Hearing Persons in Work Settings. *International Journal of Audiology*. 2003;42(Suppl 1):S128-139. <https://doi.org/10.3109/14992020309074634>
- Guambe J. Cooperatives and the Empowerment of Disabled People: The case of Zamani Disabled People's Organization in Esikhawini, Kwa-Zulu Natal [Master's thesis]. University of Zululand, Industrial Socioecology department; c2016. Available from: <https://uzspace.unizulu.ac.za/server/api/core/bitstreams/4dbc47ad-63e0-4db1-902f-12e66b6fca5/content>
- Hamill AC, Stein CH. Culture and empowerment in the Deaf community: An analysis of internet weblogs. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*. 2011;21(5):388-406. <https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.1081>
- Hennink M, Hutter I, Bailey A. *Qualitative Research Methods*. SAGE; c2020.
- Hwang MJ, Yoo-soon B. Effect of job function empowerment program for vocational rehabilitation on job competency of those with an intellectual disability. *Korean Journal of Occupational Therapy*. 2017;25(4):45-60.
- Hlatywayo L, Ncube AC. The Employing Deaf Persons: A Zimbabwean Employers Perspective. *International Journal of Innovative Research and Development*. 2014;3(10):34-44. <https://doi.org/10.9790/0837-19973742>

20. In (2017) Introduction of A Pilot Study. *Korean Journal of Anesthesiology*. 2017;70(6):601-605. <https://doi.org/10.4097/kjae.2017.70.6.601>
21. Issa A. Assessment of the Operational Challenges for People with Disabilities from the Perspective of Teachers and Parents in Saudi Arabia. *Future Arab Education Journal*. 2014;21(89):195-271.
22. Kavin D, Brown-Kurz K. The Career Experiences of Deaf Supervisors in Education and Social Service Professions: Choices, Mobility and Networking a Qualitative Study. *Journal of Applied Deaf Studies and Rehabilitation*. 2008;42(1):3.
23. Kim EJ, Byrne B, Parish SL. Deaf People and Economic Well-being: Findings from the Life Opportunities Survey. *Disability and Society*. 2018;33(3):374-391. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2017.1420631>
24. Knight T, Hauschildt S, Buchanan B, Greene A, Clark MD. It Requires a Community to Raise a Deaf Adult: A Comparative Study. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*. 2021;9(3):77-95. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2021.93006>
25. Martono S, Wulansari NA, Khoiruddin M. The Role of Empowering Leadership in Creating Employee Creativity: Moderation – Mediation Mechanism. *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science*; c2020. p. 485(012060). <https://doi.org/10.1088>
26. McKinney EL, Swartz L. Employment integration barriers: experiences of people with disabilities. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*. 2019;32(10):2298-2320. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2019.1579749>
27. Michael R. Career Self-Efficacy and Family Influence Among Youth with Different Hearing Status. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*. 2019;24(3):307-316. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1093/deafed/enz010>
28. Nagtegaal R, Boer N, Berkel R, Derks B, Tummers L. Why Do Employers (Fail to) Hire People with Disabilities? A Systematic Review of Capabilities, Opportunities and Motivations. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*. 2023;33(2):329–340. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10926-022-10076-1>
29. O'Reilly A. The Right to Decent Work of Persons with Disabilities. *International Labour Organization*; c2007. Available from: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-moscow/documents/publication/wcms_249156.pdf
30. Rahman RHA, Anuaruddin N, Rahman AAA, Patah SA, Yusof HM. Understanding the Factors of Low Employment among Deaf People from the Perspective of Job Coaches. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*. 2021;11(8):1333–1346. Available from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v11-i8/10567>
31. Rydberg E. Deaf People and the Labour Market in Sweden: Education – Employment – Economy. Örebro University; c2010. Retrieved from: <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:310710/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
32. Sheppard K. Using American Sign Language Interpreters to Facilitate Research Among Deaf Adults: Lessons Learned. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing*. 2011;22(2):129-134. Available from: <https://doi.org/doi:10.1177/1043659610395765>
33. Sudiatmaka K, Windari RA, Hartono MS, Hadi IGAA. Legal Protection and The Empowerment of The Disabled Community in Buleleng Regency. *Ganesha Law Review*. 2020;2(1):1-16. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.23887/blr.v2i1.112>
34. The Royal Association for Deaf people (RAD). Deaf Advance: Deaf People, Employment and Career Progression; c2021. Available from: <https://shorturl.at/atA46>
35. Winzer M, Mazurek K. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Reconstructing Disability to Reimagine Education. In: *The Wiley Handbook of Diversity in Special Education*. 2017;11(1):340-349. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118768778.ch1>
36. Yusof MM, Yasin MH, Hashim SH, Itam MA. Transition Programme and Barriers to Participating in the Employment Sector among Hearing Impaired Students in Malaysia. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*. 2012;47:1793-1801. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro>