

Identifying Factors Facilitating Employment Readiness in Individuals With Physical Disabilities

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Article Info

Article type:

Original Research

Section:

Rehabilitation Counseling

How to cite this article:

Ismail, S. H., Wong, A., & Al-Hinai, S. (2026). Identifying Factors Facilitating Employment Readiness in Individuals With Physical Disabilities. *KMAN Counseling and Psychology Nexus*, 4, 1-10.

<http://doi.org/10.61838/kman.rc.psynexus.5448>



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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify the key personal, social, environmental, and experiential factors that facilitate employment readiness among individuals with physical disabilities in Canada. This qualitative study employed a descriptive-exploratory design using semi-structured interviews with 24 adults with physical disabilities residing in Canada. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling from disability organizations, rehabilitation networks, and online communities. Interviews were conducted virtually or in person, audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. Thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo software to support systematic coding, category development, and theme refinement. Analytic rigor was enhanced through constant comparison, peer debriefing, audit-trail documentation, and member-checking with a subset of participants. Four major themes emerged. (1) Personal capacities—including self-efficacy, psychological resilience, adaptability, and health-management strategies—significantly enhanced participants' sense of readiness. (2) Supportive social and environmental systems, such as family encouragement, peer networks, vocational professionals, and inclusive workplace cultures, facilitated confidence and access to opportunities. (3) Environmental and structural enablers, including accessible infrastructure, assistive technologies, flexible work arrangements, and disability-friendly hiring practices, reduced systemic barriers and strengthened readiness. (4) Employment-related experiences and identity formation, such as prior work exposure, positive employer interactions, and successful accommodation histories, contributed to vocational identity and perceived preparedness. Overall, readiness emerged as a dynamic process shaped by the interplay of internal strengths, social supports, structural resources, and developmental work experiences. The findings demonstrate that employment readiness among individuals with physical disabilities extends beyond individual skills and is profoundly influenced by social relationships, organizational practices, and structural accessibility.

Keywords: employment readiness; physical disabilities; qualitative research; vocational rehabilitation; workplace inclusion; accessibility

1. Introduction

Employment readiness for individuals with physical disabilities has become an increasingly important topic across global policy, rehabilitation, and workforce development domains. As labor markets confront rising skill demands, rapid digitalization, and post-pandemic restructuring, understanding how people with disabilities negotiate the transition into employment is essential for addressing longstanding inequalities. Although significant progress has been made in disability rights and employment policy, individuals with physical disabilities continue to experience disproportionately high rates of unemployment, underemployment, and labor-market exclusion. Scholars note that these gaps persist despite legislative and organizational efforts aimed at promoting equity and workplace inclusion (Garcia-Torres et al., 2025). The multifaceted nature of employment readiness requires deeper qualitative attention to how personal capacities, social systems, and structural contexts interact to influence individuals' preparedness for work.

Recent international research underscores the complexity of employment-related barriers for individuals with disabilities. For instance, global scoping reviews show that disability-specific employment gaps persist across both high-income and lower-income countries, driven by structural, attitudinal, and skill-related challenges (Avellone et al., 2023). This underscores the need for more nuanced examinations of local, sector-specific, and condition-specific experiences. Sector-focused studies similarly suggest that awareness, preparedness, and readiness vary substantially depending on the industry. For example, research on the hospitality sector reveals that employer awareness significantly shapes readiness indicators for persons with disabilities and plays a central role in determining whether they can effectively enter and remain in the workforce (Galileo, 2025). These findings illustrate that employment readiness is not merely an individual trait, but rather an outcome that is socially and structurally shaped.

Across the literature, one of the most consistent challenges relates to the persistence of employer biases and misconceptions. Studies examining hiring practices, especially within small and medium-sized enterprises, demonstrate that employers often hold inaccurate perceptions about the productivity, accommodation costs, and workplace integration of people with disabilities (Goodman et al., 2024). These biases influence both the availability of opportunities and the willingness of

organizations to provide reasonable accommodations. Workplaces frequently lack the internal capacity or knowledge needed to implement inclusive practices, despite the presence of legal requirements and guidelines under frameworks such as ADA Title I. Reviews of employer and employee experiences in implementing ADA-related workplace flexibility indicate that organizations struggle with inconsistent policy implementation and varying interpretations of legal obligations (Garcia-Torres et al., 2025). These inconsistencies create uncertainty for workers with physical disabilities and hinder their sense of readiness during job-seeking processes.

Beyond employer attitudes, the lived experiences of individuals with disabilities reveal substantial barriers at the structural and environmental levels. Research exploring reintegration challenges shows that many individuals with disabilities face disjointed service systems, inadequate rehabilitation support, and limited access to effective vocational programs (Chikwe et al., 2024). In addition, policy frameworks often fail to meaningfully address systemic inequities, resulting in fragmented support structures that are difficult for individuals to navigate. Cross-national analyses indicate that even in settings with strong legal protections, individuals with disabilities struggle to access high-quality vocational training, adaptive technologies, and employment placement services (Nguyen et al., 2024). These gaps highlight an urgent need for employment readiness models that are responsive to diverse disability experiences and grounded in participants' own perspectives.

Some studies emphasize that readiness is shaped not only by structural barriers but also by individual-level factors, including confidence, self-efficacy, and adaptability. Research on the transition from school to work for individuals with mild intellectual disabilities suggests that personal competencies evolve within complex social environments and are significantly influenced by family engagement, teacher expectations, and organizational practices (Dzhugudza et al., 2025). These dynamics are similarly relevant for individuals with physical disabilities, whose employment pathways are heavily shaped by early opportunities, exposure to accessible environments, and the development of workplace-related skills. Findings from educational and pre-employment service research further demonstrate that the quality of transition planning strongly influences future employability outcomes (Rowe et al., 2024). These studies suggest that readiness begins well before an individual enters the labor market; it is cultivated

through early experiences, sustained training, and consistent support.

Another important dimension involves the role of vocational training and pre-employment interventions. International studies demonstrate that effective vocational training, paired with job placement and ongoing support, substantially enhances employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities (Nguyen et al., 2024). However, the implementation of such programs is often inconsistent. Research evaluating pre-employment transition services reveals weaknesses in delivery models, coordination challenges, and inadequate communication across service providers (Lau et al., 2024). Despite these challenges, well-designed programs show strong potential for improving job-readiness outcomes, especially when they incorporate individualized support, career planning, and work-based learning experiences. Work-based learning, in particular, is increasingly recognized as an effective mechanism for skill acquisition among learners with special needs (Zhang, 2023).

The role of workplace accommodations also appears prominently in the literature. A growing body of research identifies both facilitators and barriers associated with securing reasonable accommodations in organizational settings. Cross-sectional studies reveal that individuals with physical disabilities frequently encounter insufficient or improperly implemented accommodations, inconsistent support from supervisors, and uncertainty in navigating disclosure processes (Wong et al., 2024). However, when accommodations are effectively integrated, they substantially enhance workers' sense of competence, emotional well-being, and overall employment readiness. These findings align with broader research demonstrating that flexible workplace arrangements—including remote work and modified schedules—can significantly improve employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. Notably, qualitative research examining post-pandemic work experiences reveals that remote work often creates unprecedented accessibility advantages, allowing individuals to manage fatigue, physical symptoms, and transportation barriers more effectively (Lake & Maidment, 2023).

Emerging research also explores employment readiness from the perspective of broader social and cultural influences. For example, studies conducted in Malaysia identify cultural norms, employer expectations, and organizational models as key contributors to the employability challenges faced by graduates with

disabilities (Ellafi et al., 2024). Similarly, studies on sustainable employment models emphasize the importance of organizational systems, leadership support, and intersectoral collaboration in improving employment outcomes for individuals with physical disabilities (Ragmoun & Abdulaziz, 2024). These cross-cultural insights highlight that employment readiness is not uniform across contexts and that broader sociocultural factors have the potential to either enable or constrain opportunities.

Research on special needs education and disability-related school performance further demonstrates that readiness encompasses emotional, academic, and adaptive competencies developed early in life. Studies in educational settings show that learners' performance and readiness for occupational therapy-based interventions are influenced by their personal characteristics, environmental conditions, and support systems (Lersilp et al., 2024). A related line of research examines how counselors support career readiness across student populations and emphasizes that disability status often shapes access to resources, guidance, and tailored career pathways (Novak et al., 2024). Furthermore, scholars using data-driven methods to improve college and career readiness for students with disabilities underscore the value of evidence-based frameworks that integrate data monitoring, targeted feedback, and systematic intervention (Taconet et al., 2023). These educational and pre-vocational perspectives underscore the long-term developmental nature of employment readiness.

Broader theoretical examinations reveal that readiness is linked to work identity formation, emotional preparedness, and social integration. Qualitative analyses looking at entrenched barriers—such as discrimination, stigma, and social perceptions about disability—show that individuals with disabilities internalize and navigate these messages in ways that influence their employment trajectories (Roddy, 2023). Additional research on workplace practices identifies how individuals with disabilities adapt to organizational cultures, negotiate identities, and develop professional competencies across time (Kicherova & Lozovaya, 2022). In some contexts, the ability to negotiate these identities is supported by remote, hybrid, or satellite-office arrangements that were expanded during and after the pandemic; studies in Japan highlight that specialized office structures can support employees with ADHD and ASD through improved management frameworks and targeted supports (Honda & Yoshinaga, 2024). Together, these findings reinforce that employment readiness is intertwined with personal, relational, and structural processes.

Taken together, the existing literature demonstrates a clear need for qualitative research that centers the lived experiences of individuals with physical disabilities, particularly within national contexts such as Canada where policy and rehabilitation systems differ from other global settings. While numerous studies have examined barriers, facilitators, vocational interventions, and employer attitudes, few have synthesized these insights through rich qualitative accounts that reveal how individuals construct a sense of readiness within their everyday lives. This gap underscores the importance of exploring employment readiness not only as a policy goal but also as a personal and social experience shaped by diverse supports, constraints, and identity processes.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to identify and explore the factors that facilitate employment readiness among individuals with physical disabilities in Canada.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the factors that facilitate employment readiness among individuals with physical disabilities. A qualitative approach was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and contextual challenges related to employment preparation. The study used a descriptive-exploratory orientation to identify themes grounded in participants' narratives.

Participants were recruited using purposive sampling to ensure inclusion of individuals who could provide rich and relevant insights into the employment readiness process. The sample consisted of 24 adults with physical disabilities residing in Canada, representing diverse age groups, gender identities, educational backgrounds, and employment histories. Eligibility criteria included: (1) having a medically documented physical disability, (2) being of working age (18 years or older), and (3) having prior experience with job-seeking or vocational preparation processes. Recruitment was supported through disability support organizations, online community networks, and vocational rehabilitation centers.

Sampling continued until theoretical saturation was reached—defined as the point at which no new conceptual categories or significant insights emerged during analysis. Saturation was achieved after 24 interviews, and no additional participants were recruited thereafter.

2.2. Measures

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, allowing participants to express their experiences and perspectives in their own words while ensuring consistency across core topics. An interview guide was developed based on existing literature and expert consultation in the fields of disability studies and vocational rehabilitation. Key areas of inquiry included perceived facilitators of employment readiness, personal and environmental resources, technological and social supports, training experiences, and barriers that participants overcame.

Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or through secure online video platforms, depending on participant preference and accessibility needs. Each interview lasted between 45 and 75 minutes and was audio-recorded with consent. All interviews were transcribed verbatim to preserve linguistic nuances and contextual depth. Field notes documenting non-verbal cues, reflections, and contextual observations were written immediately after each session to enhance analytic rigor.

2.3. Data analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following a multi-stage iterative process. Transcripts were imported into NVivo qualitative data analysis software, which facilitated systematic coding, organization, and retrieval of data segments. The analysis began with repeated readings of transcripts to achieve familiarization with content, followed by open coding to identify meaningful units of information. Codes were then compared, refined, and grouped into broader categories that captured patterns related to employment readiness facilitators.

Axial coding was used to examine relationships across categories and to integrate subthemes into core themes representing the structural components of employment readiness for individuals with physical disabilities. Throughout the analysis, constant comparison was employed to ensure consistency across interviews and to validate emerging insights against the full dataset. The analytic process was conducted concurrently with data collection to support the determination of theoretical saturation.

To enhance trustworthiness, the study incorporated strategies such as peer debriefing, maintaining an audit trail, and conducting member checks with a subset of participants,

who confirmed that the themes reflected their experiences accurately.

3. Findings and Results

The study included 24 participants with physical disabilities residing across multiple provinces in Canada. Participants ranged in age from 22 to 58 years ($M = 39.6$), with 14 identifying as women, 9 as men, and 1 as non-binary. In terms of educational background, 10 participants reported completing post-secondary college or technical programs, 8 held university degrees, and 6 had completed high school as their highest level of education. The sample also included

individuals living with diverse physical disabilities, including mobility impairments ($n = 11$), neuromuscular conditions ($n = 6$), chronic pain or musculoskeletal disorders ($n = 4$), and limb differences or amputations ($n = 3$). Employment histories varied: 7 participants were currently employed (full- or part-time), 9 were actively seeking employment, and 8 had disengaged from the job market within the past two years. Participants represented multiple provinces, including Ontario ($n = 8$), British Columbia ($n = 5$), Alberta ($n = 4$), Quebec ($n = 3$), and the Atlantic provinces ($n = 4$). Overall, the demographic diversity of the sample provided a rich range of perspectives on employment readiness among adults with physical disabilities.

Table 1

Themes, Subthemes, and Concepts

Main Theme	Subtheme	Concepts (Open Codes)
Personal Capacities Enhancing Employment Readiness	Skills Development & Training	practical skills acquisition; technology literacy; job-specific competencies; continuous learning motivation; self-paced training strategies
	Psychological Resilience	coping with setbacks; emotional endurance; reframing challenges; stress management techniques
	Self-Efficacy & Confidence Building	belief in ability to work; positive self-talk; mastery experiences; previous job success shaping confidence
	Adaptation & Problem-Solving	flexible thinking; creative workaround strategies; adaptive routines; solution-focused mindset
	Goal Orientation & Motivation	clear career goals; internal drive; persistence; future planning; readiness to take initiative
	Health Management Strategies	energy conservation techniques; medication adherence; self-monitoring of symptoms
	Personal Autonomy & Independence	decision-making control; self-directed career choices; managing daily responsibilities
	Family Support Dynamics	emotional encouragement; financial assistance; caregiving support; family advocacy
	Peer and Community Support	peer mentoring; disability community networks; shared lived experiences
	Professional Rehabilitation Support	vocational counselors; job coaches; employment readiness programs; career-planning sessions
Supportive Social and Environmental Systems	Inclusive Workplace Culture	acceptance from colleagues; supportive supervisors; openness to accommodations; anti-stigma attitudes
	Assistive and Adaptive Resources	mobility aids; workplace assistive technologies; ergonomic adjustments
	Policy and Institutional Supports	disability employment legislation; inclusive hiring policies; government funding programs; accessibility standards enforcement
	Accessible Infrastructure	barrier-free buildings; transportation access; accessible pathways; adaptive workplace layouts
	Digital and Technological Accessibility	screen readers; accessible job platforms; adaptive software; digital literacy tools
	Organizational Flexibility	remote work options; flexible scheduling; task modification; hybrid work opportunities
	Disability-Friendly Hiring Processes	simplified applications; accessible interviews; alternative competency assessments
	Financial and Resource Availability	disability benefits; training funding; employment subsidies; access to affordable assistive tools
	Positive Work Exposure	internships; volunteering; job shadowing; workplace trial opportunities
	Past Barriers as Learning Sources	navigating discrimination; overcoming inaccessibility; lessons from failed applications
Environmental and Structural Enablers	Vocational Identity Development	sense of workforce belonging; alignment with career values; self-identification as a worker
Employment-Related Experiences and Identity		

Interaction with Employers	employer feedback; supportive communication; inclusive recruitment practices; clear expectations
Career Adaptation & Growth Mindset	readiness for role change; learning from challenges; openness to new roles; long-term growth orientation
Workplace Accommodation Experiences	requesting accommodations; negotiation of needs; positive or negative accommodation outcomes

Participants consistently emphasized that employment readiness was shaped by a constellation of personal capacities that helped them navigate both internal challenges and external job-market expectations. Subthemes included skills development, psychological resilience, self-efficacy, problem-solving adaptability, goal orientation, health management, and personal autonomy. Participants described how acquiring job-specific skills and technological literacy increased their sense of preparedness. One participant noted, “Learning new software made me feel like I could finally compete on equal footing.” Psychological resilience emerged as another core factor, with individuals describing emotional strength and the ability to reframe challenges constructively; as one participant stated, “Every setback taught me something, and I learned not to let it crush me.” Enhanced self-efficacy was reflected in participants’ growing belief in their ability to navigate the world of work, often rooted in successful past experiences. Adaptation and problem-solving were also central, as individuals developed creative strategies to handle limitations. Participants additionally highlighted goal orientation and personal motivation, describing their readiness to pursue clear career paths. Health management strategies such as pacing, fatigue control, and symptom monitoring helped maintain consistency during job preparation. Overall, these personal capacities formed an internal foundation that many interviewees considered essential for moving confidently toward employment.

Participants described an ecosystem of social and professional support structures that played a pivotal role in facilitating employment readiness. These included family support, peer networks, professional rehabilitation services, inclusive workplace cultures, assistive resources, and policy-level supports. Many interviewees emphasized that encouragement from family members, emotional validation, and practical help enabled them to pursue employment goals despite physical limitations. As one participant expressed, “My family cheered me on when I doubted myself—they made me believe I could work again.” Peer and community networks also served as important sources of shared experience and empowerment. Professional supports such as vocational counselors, job coaches, and structured readiness programs provided guidance, helped refine job-search skills,

and offered individualized career planning. Participants further highlighted how inclusive workplace cultures, especially supportive supervisors and colleagues, made a significant difference in their confidence during job preparation. Assistive devices and adaptive tools, ranging from mobility aids to ergonomic equipment, were also mentioned frequently as enablers of independence. Some participants underscored the value of government policies and disability employment programs, with one noting, “Without provincial funding for accommodations, I couldn’t even think about returning to work.” Together, these social and environmental factors created a supportive backdrop that strengthened participants’ readiness for employment.

The third theme captured the broader structural and environmental facilitators that shaped participants’ pathways toward job readiness, including accessible infrastructure, technological accessibility, organizational flexibility, inclusive hiring practices, and financial resource availability. Many participants described how improved physical accessibility—such as barrier-free workspaces and accessible transportation—directly influenced their ability to even consider employment. One interviewee shared, “If the building isn’t accessible, that’s the end of the conversation. Accessibility opens the first door.” Technological accessibility also played an essential role, with participants relying on screen readers, adaptive software, and accessible digital platforms during job searching and training. Organizational flexibility was particularly valued, especially remote and hybrid work options, modified tasks, and flexible schedules tailored to fluctuating health conditions. Several interviewees stated that disability-friendly hiring practices—such as accessible interview formats and alternative assessments—reduced anxiety and increased fairness. Financial supports, including disability benefits, training subsidies, and funding for assistive devices, allowed participants to focus on preparing for employment without overwhelming financial strain. Collectively, these structural enablers reduced systemic barriers and created conditions where participants could realistically work toward employment readiness.

Participants highlighted that their evolving sense of vocational identity and prior experiences with the workforce played a central role in shaping their readiness for

employment. Subthemes included positive work exposure, learning through past barriers, development of vocational identity, interactions with employers, growth mindset, and accommodation experiences. Many interviewees described internships, volunteer work, or previous employment as critical stepping stones that helped them build confidence. As one participant remarked, “Volunteering showed me I still had something valuable to offer—it was a turning point.” Even negative experiences, such as discrimination or inaccessible environments, became sources of learning and resilience. Participants also discussed how developing a strong vocational identity—seeing themselves as legitimate members of the workforce—was a gradual process shaped by successes and failures. Positive interactions with employers, including transparent communication and supportive hiring practices, increased participants’ belief in their ability to succeed in employment contexts. A growth mindset was also evident, with individuals describing their readiness to adapt to new roles and learn continuously. Experiences with workplace accommodations varied, but when successful, participants described them as transformative. As one interviewee put it, “Once my needs were accommodated properly, I felt like I could finally focus on doing my job—not on surviving.” These experiences collectively shaped participants’ evolving sense of belonging, competence, and confidence in the world of work.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to identify the factors that facilitate employment readiness among individuals with physical disabilities living in Canada. The findings revealed a multifaceted set of influences spanning personal capacities, social support systems, environmental resources, and employment-related experiences. These findings align with and extend the growing body of international scholarship on disability and workforce integration. A key insight emerging from this study is that employment readiness is not solely a matter of individual motivation or skill acquisition, but rather an interactive process shaped by structural, interpersonal, and identity-related factors. This perspective is strongly supported by previous research emphasizing that people with disabilities encounter complex intersections of personal competence, organizational culture, and systemic accessibility barriers, all of which shape their trajectory into employment (Wong et al., 2024). By situating the findings within global literature, this discussion demonstrates the

convergence and divergence of experiences across national and cultural contexts.

One of the most prominent findings in the current study concerned the importance of personal capacities such as psychological resilience, self-efficacy, adaptive problem-solving, and health management. These capacities functioned as core internal resources that enabled participants to navigate fluctuating symptoms, overcome self-doubt, and sustain momentum in their employment journeys. The emphasis on these personal factors resonates with earlier findings that highlight the role of individual competencies in shaping employment outcomes for people with disabilities. For instance, research on the school-to-work transition for individuals with mild intellectual disabilities underscores the importance of personal readiness, adaptability, and self-efficacy in navigating new roles and expectations (Dzhugudzha et al., 2025). Similarly, in a scoping review of self-employment outcomes, personal resilience and motivation were identified as crucial determinants in achieving employment success among individuals with disabilities (Avellone et al., 2023). These parallels reinforce the idea that readiness is not a static attribute but a dynamic process shaped by individuals’ ongoing ability to manage their conditions and build confidence.

Beyond personal capacities, participants in this study emphasized the importance of supportive social and environmental systems, including family encouragement, peer networks, rehabilitation professionals, and accessible workplace cultures. This finding echoes a substantial body of literature demonstrating that social support plays a critical role in enabling employment pathways. Studies conducted across diverse cultural settings highlight the influence of social and community environments on employability, including the ways in which families, educators, and community members contribute to the development of work-oriented skills and attitudes (Lersilp et al., 2024). In Malaysia, for example, research has shown that structural and cultural sources of support significantly shape the employability of graduates with disabilities (Ellafi et al., 2024). Similarly, vocational training centers and job placement programs have been found to promote employment opportunities by providing guidance, skill development, and strategic career planning (Nguyen et al., 2024). These converging insights underscore that employment readiness is best understood within a broader social ecology where interpersonal support and professional intervention work in tandem to shape outcomes.

Another major theme identified in this study relates to the significance of environmental and structural enablers such as accessible infrastructure, technological supports, flexible organizational policies, and inclusive hiring processes. These structural resources were described by participants as crucial conditions that either enabled or constrained their readiness to pursue employment. This mirrors findings in cross-sectional and organizational research, where structural barriers such as inaccessible workplaces, inconsistent policy implementation, and limited organizational knowledge of accommodations often hinder employment participation (Garcia-Torres et al., 2025). Remote and hybrid work arrangements—highlighted by several participants—also emerged as powerful facilitators of readiness, particularly for individuals managing chronic pain, mobility impairments, or fatigue. This is strongly supported by qualitative research showing that remote work greatly increased accessibility and autonomy for people with physical disabilities following the COVID-19 pandemic, enabling them to manage symptoms more effectively and reduce transportation-related barriers (Lake & Maidment, 2023). Such findings highlight the broader role of structural reforms in shaping the landscape of disability employment.

The final theme concerned employment-related experiences and vocational identity development. Participants emphasized the role of prior exposures—such as volunteering, internships, or past employment—in strengthening their sense of competence and belonging in the workforce. These findings align with earlier studies demonstrating that work-based learning, internships, and experiential opportunities build vocational identity and improve transition outcomes for individuals with disabilities (Zhang, 2023). Exposure to real-world work environments has been repeatedly shown to enhance practical skills, increase confidence, and support career exploration. Insights from pre-employment transition research also indicate that experiential learning is central for developing readiness and competence, particularly when delivered through structured stages of learning and supported by rehabilitation personnel (Rowe et al., 2024). In this study, participants who had positive interactions with employers or had successfully navigated accommodation processes described a greater sense of readiness and belonging—an emotional and identity-based outcome that has been highlighted in previous qualitative analyses of workplace practices (Kicherova & Lozovaya, 2022).

The current findings also align with existing literature concerning employer biases, misconceptions, and

accommodation challenges. Participants described how negative past experiences, perceived stigma, or inconsistent accommodations created emotional barriers to readiness. This is consistent with research showing that employers in small and medium-sized businesses often hold inaccurate assumptions about the costs and feasibility of accommodations, leading to reluctance in hiring or supporting workers with disabilities (Goodman et al., 2024). These organizational attitudes shape not only opportunities but also individuals' psychological readiness to enter or re-enter the workforce. Parallel findings from U.S.-based studies indicate that individuals with adult-onset physical disabilities face challenges stemming from supervisor attitudes, limited organizational knowledge about disability, and inconsistent accommodation implementation (Dinelli et al., 2024). Taken together, this broader literature provides strong support for participants' experiences and demonstrates the pervasive influence of employer attitudes on employment readiness.

The findings also resonate with research that emphasizes the significance of policy-level interventions. For example, studies focusing on sustainable employment models for people with physical disabilities identify policy-driven support systems—such as inclusive hiring frameworks, funding for assistive devices, and enforcement of accessibility standards—as essential for long-term workforce integration (Ragmoun & Abdulaziz, 2024). Within the broader academic discourse, policy reforms are consistently viewed as central to reducing systemic inequities and facilitating equitable participation. Evidence from multisectoral and cross-cultural studies likewise demonstrates that readiness is shaped not only by individual skill development but also by the extent to which policy, education, and employment systems are effectively coordinated (Novak et al., 2024; Taconet et al., 2023). The current study reinforces this perspective by showing that structural supports directly influence participants' ability to prepare for employment.

Additionally, the findings extend existing research on education-to-employment pipelines and highlight the developmental nature of employment readiness. Research on school performance readiness and transition planning emphasizes that readiness begins with early exposure to structured support systems that build confidence, emotional skills, and practical competencies (Lau et al., 2024; Lersilp et al., 2024). For individuals with disabilities, the transition to employment involves navigating interconnected systems that include education, healthcare, and vocational

rehabilitation—all of which must be sufficiently integrated to maximize success. The participants' descriptions of navigating fragmented or insufficient support systems parallel findings from reintegration studies that document how complex or disjointed rehabilitation pathways create barriers for job seekers with disabilities (Chikwe et al., 2024). These parallels demonstrate that readiness is contingent on broader service coordination and the availability of clear pathways to employment.

Overall, the findings of this study enrich the international conversation about disability employment by offering detailed insights into the lived experiences of individuals with physical disabilities in Canada. They support the growing understanding that readiness is shaped through the interplay of personal strengths, social environments, structural conditions, and identity processes. This integrated perspective advances previous scholarship by demonstrating how these themes converge in everyday life contexts and how they jointly influence the readiness to engage with the labor market. In this way, the present study contributes to filling an important knowledge gap in the literature, particularly in relation to the Canadian context, where qualitative accounts remain comparatively underrepresented.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The sample size, while appropriate for qualitative research, was limited to 24 participants and may not capture the full heterogeneity of experiences across Canada's diverse disability communities. All participants self-selected into the study, which may lead to an overrepresentation of individuals who are more engaged, more motivated, or more connected to support networks, introducing potential selection bias. The study also focused exclusively on individuals with physical disabilities, thereby excluding the perspectives of individuals with sensory, cognitive, or psychosocial disabilities whose employment readiness experiences may differ. Additionally, regional variations in provincial disability services and employment programs may influence the generalizability of findings to other areas of Canada. Finally, although thematic analysis offers rich insights into lived experiences, the interpretive nature of qualitative coding introduces the possibility of researcher bias despite efforts to enhance trustworthiness through audit trails and peer debriefing.

Future research should explore employment readiness among individuals with diverse disability types, including cognitive, psychiatric, and sensory disabilities, to deepen understanding across disability groups. Longitudinal studies

could help clarify how employment readiness evolves over time and which interventions have sustained impacts on confidence, skill development, and employment outcomes. Comparative studies across provinces or countries would provide insight into how policy differences influence readiness. Research should also investigate the role of technology—particularly artificial intelligence, remote work infrastructures, and digital accessibility tools—in shaping readiness trajectories. Finally, additional qualitative studies involving employers, vocational counselors, rehabilitation specialists, and policymakers would offer a more holistic picture of the systemic factors affecting employment readiness.

Programs designed to support individuals with disabilities should adopt a holistic approach that integrates skill development, psychological resilience training, and health management strategies. Employers should strengthen workplace accommodation processes, promote inclusive organizational cultures, and invest in disability awareness training. Rehabilitation providers should prioritize individualized job-readiness planning, experiential learning opportunities, and cross-sector collaboration. Policymakers should expand funding for assistive technologies, improve coordination among service systems, and enhance enforcement of accessibility standards to support equitable participation in the labor market.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all individuals helped us to do the project.

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Funding

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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