

Article

**Reasonable Accommodation, Career Development, and Psychological Well-being: Autoethnography as a Method of Qualitative Research**

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**Abstract:** Individuals with health issues and disabilities tend to encounter difficulties in the workplace, including decreased productivity and lower job performance compared to those without such problems. Nevertheless, creating a workplace environment that accommodates individuals with disabilities can help them overcome workplace obstacles and fulfil their job duties at the same level as disability-free individuals. Providing reasonable accommodation is one practical step in establishing an inclusive environment for those with vision impairments, leading to career development and psychological well-being. This paper focuses on workplace-related autoethnographic stories to explore the fundamental aspects of reasonable accommodation, career development, and psychological well-being for individuals with vision impairments. This study employed the method of autoethnography in qualitative research. Autoethnographic data was collected through personal reflection and the collection of relevant artefacts. Thematic analysis was used for the data analysis procedure. Therefore, having a disability does not necessarily mean an individual cannot do their job to the necessary standard. Visually impaired individuals can excel in their careers and attain psychological well-being when they are part of a workplace environment that is accommodating to their needs. To enhance job performance, career goals, and psychological well-being among employed disabled individuals, it is necessary to define "reasonable accommodation" in the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, based on the UN Convention.

**Keywords:** Vision impairment; reasonable accommodations; career development; psychological well-being; narrative inquiry

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## Introduction

As a congenitally visually impaired individual with notable professional achievements (the first author), I have long contemplated documenting my workplace experiences. Despite having numerous ideas to convey to my readers, I have opted not to record them, potentially because of the absence of favourable timing.

Due to the significant impact of vision impairment as a disability (Bhaskar et al. 2022), it can be challenging to effectively execute your job, particularly while working alongside disability-free coworkers in the

same work environment. Developing yourself in a career while being disabled is a difficult task. Overcoming disability-related prejudices and discrimination can be a complicated task that often results in feelings of disappointment, discouragement, tension, and sadness. Interacting with individuals who are either incapable or unwilling to comprehend your health limitations can be quite problematic. Working with individuals who disregard or overlook your diligent efforts can be difficult. Individuals with vision impairments face an additional challenge in time management due to their slower reading speed than those with sight. Nevertheless, my vision impairment does not hinder my ability to carry out my professional responsibilities or engage in everyday tasks such as household chores, cooking, laundering, and travelling. According to Bhaskar et al. (2022), I perceive myself as a "master of circumstance", who is willing to adopt certain processes, support their families, be resilient, maintain positive relationships with the able-bodied, bounce back after rejection, influence mindset changes, and use technologies, rather than a "victim of circumstance."

Two autoethnography-based studies encouraged and pushed me to compose my narratives. The author of the first study was Block Pamela, a university lecturer with a mobility impairment (Block, 2020); the second one was Heidi Lourens, a South African visually impaired university lecturer in Psychology (Lourens, 2021). I hope this autoethnography inspires both abled and disabled individuals not to give up and to approach the future with optimism drawing inspiration from the abovementioned studies that motivated me to express my experiences through writing. Hopefully, my workplace-related narratives, especially career journey narratives inspire able-bodied individuals to appreciate favourable health circumstances and disabled individuals, demonstrating the immense potential for accomplishing professional aspirations despite physical restrictions. In this autoethnography, I have chosen not to address the workplace difficulties faced by visually impaired individuals since I believe it falls under a separate research topic. This autoethnographic paper focuses on workplace-related stories to explore the fundamental aspects of reasonable accommodation, career development, and psychological well-being for individuals with vision impairments.

## Literature Review

Individuals with various health issues and disabilities encounter workplace-related challenges, such as decreased productivity and job performance, more frequently than those who are healthy (Gulyamova et al. 2023). For instance, job performance was lower among individuals with depression (Coduti et al. 2015; Lerner et al. 2004), sclerosis (Bonafede et al. 2021; Rodriguez et al. 2022), migraine (Begasse & Sakai, 2022; Shimizu et al. 2021; Wong et al. 2020), gout (Kleinman et al. 2007), myeloma (Merola et al. 2018), and rhinitis (Meijster et al. 2011) than the abovementioned health troubles-free ones. Moreover, individuals with much more serious health issues such as mental disorder (De Lorenzo, 2013; Snyder et al. 2010), diabetes (Dall et al. 2008), oropharyngeal cancer (Smith et al. 2021), breast cancer (Wan et al. 2013), psoriatic arthritis (Rodriguez et al. 2022; Rotaru et al. 2021), asthma (Meijster et al. 2011), musculoskeletal disorders (Lötters et al. 2005), and cardiovascular diseases (Song et al. 2015) were also considered to be "low performers".

However, if individuals with health problems and disabilities work in a disability-friendly workplace environment, they can perform their jobs at a required level, sometimes even at a higher level than the expectation (Hernandez & McDonald, 2010; Hua et al. 2013, 2014, 2015; Yamatani et al. 2015). Providing reasonable accommodations for qualified disabled individuals is a vivid form of creating a disability-friendly workplace environment. In turn, as Yusupov and Abdukhalilov (2022) stated that disabled personnel can only properly handle their duties with reasonable accommodations despite meeting all job requirements.

Based on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006), reasonable accommodations refer to the necessary and appropriate modifications and adjustments that should be made, without imposing an excessive or unfair burden, to ensure that individuals with disabilities can enjoy and exercise their human rights and fundamental freedoms equally with others, which was also stressed in the 2-article of the Malaysia Persons with Disabilities Act of 2008 (Malaysia, 2014). On a global scale, about 1 billion individuals require a minimum of one assistive product. According to projections by the World Health Organisation (WHO),

over 2 billion individuals will require a minimum of one assistive device by 2030. Additionally, even elderly individuals will need two or more assistive products. Currently, only 1 out of every ten individuals can utilise assistive technology. This includes 75 million people with physical impairments and 466 million with hearing loss who require access to such technology (WHO, 2018, 2021c).

Reasonable accommodation was the step in the workplace adaptation process (Leber et al. 2018), enhancing job performance (Gold et al. 2012), socioeconomic conditions (WHO, 2021), job satisfaction (Gold et al. 2012), psychological well-being (WHO, 2021) among disabled individuals. Additionally, accommodating increased the rate of employability (Bhaskar et al. 2022; Blanco, 2021; Jeon et al. 2022; Makkawy & Long, 2021) and better fit into the workplace environment (Patvardhan & Santoki, 2019) among visually impaired individuals.

## Methodology

Autoethnography is a potent qualitative research methodology that integrates autobiography and ethnography. In contrast to narrative inquiry and case study, autoethnography blends personal experience with cultural analysis, employing self-reflection to explore the relationship between individual experiences and standards. This means research involves a researcher using personal experiences to understand and analyse cultural and social contexts. In contrast, narrative inquiry emphasises the comprehension of individual stories and their significance, primarily through human narratives. Moreover, a case study concentrates on a specific instance within its environment, incorporating numerous perspectives and data sources for a thorough analysis (Creswell, 2014; Leavy, 2020; Saldana, 2011). According to Lourens (2021), a university lecturer with visible vision impairment, autoethnography empowers disabled authors to articulate a rich and intricate account of their lived experiences. It establishes the interconnectedness of inner and outer realities, interrelationships between a physical body (which is disabled) and a community (which is not disabled), and the fit and unfit between a physical body and environment. Hence, autoethnography was selected for this study.

Autoethnographic data was collected through personal reflection and the collection of relevant artifacts. During a personal reflection, a researcher used her text and voice messages sent over Facebook, Telegram, and WhatsApp, as well as emails exchanged with family members, close friends, and coworkers. These communications served a researcher to express and clarify her thoughts and memories. Photographs, social media posts (on platforms such as Facebook and Telegram), and diaries served as artifacts that provided concrete context to a researcher's narratives. Since authenticity (the date and location of the photos were taken), context (captions, comments and who targeted provided additional supporting information), and corroboration (witness statements, official documentation and video footage) were taken into consideration, it was regarded to be validated (APA, 2015).

Thematic analysis was used in the context of data analysis. This involved identifying and categorising themes from the narratives and artifacts collected (Creswell, 2014). Identified themes include reasonable accommodation, career development, and psychological well-being.

## Findings & Discussion

### 1. Reasonable Accommodations

Assistive materials, devices, and technologies are considered reasonable accommodations; they include large-print publications, materials in Braille, Braille displays, magnifiers, screen readers, etc. for visually impaired (blind and low vision) individuals. It is estimated that by 2030, around 200 million people with low vision will require assistive products (WHO, 2018, 2021c).

Young individuals with sensory impairments who have full-time employment, high levels of education, and an understanding of accommodation policies and procedures were more likely to request and receive accommodations. There was a higher demand for reasonable accommodations among individuals with more severe sensory impairments than those with less severe ones (Dong & Guerette, 2013). In turn, visually impaired

individuals refrained from seeking reasonable accommodations due to a lack of awareness about the policy (Bleach, 2022; Dong et al. 2017; Lourens, 2021; McDonnall & Lund, 2020) and concerns about potential job loss (Dong et al. 2017; Patvardhan & Santoki, 2019).

### *Large-Printed Materials*

As I remember, it was at the end of January 2017, at the English and Foreign Languages University, India. Classes had already commenced. However, I struggled with the hardcopy materials professors distributed during our classes. All lesson materials were 10-12 in size with landscape orientation. Despite having a mechanical handheld magnifier, it could not give me a clear vision. I was unable to discern individual rows. The contents of the paper were thoroughly blended in front of my eyes. The professor detected the issue and promptly notified the programme coordinator. Subsequently, I consistently received hardcopy materials in portrait orientation with 22, sometimes 24 sizes. I was pleased to receive reasonable accommodation in the form of large-printed materials.

### *Electronic Table Magnifier and Screen Reader*

According to Rosner and Perlman (2018), individuals with congenital vision impairments were more receptive to using assistive technology and devices than those with acquired vision impairments. Many individuals with vision impairments often opt to employ magnifying tools instead of depending exclusively on speech software and Braille displays. Nevertheless, most individuals predominantly depend on the combination of speech software and Braille displays rather than solely relying on voice software. However, they had more access to modified work hours, working from home, and workstations compared to the availability of technical aids, communication aids, and personal computers with specialised software (screen reader) (Gupta et al. 2021).

As an individual with a congenital vision impairment, I aim to share my narrative on the accommodations I received assistive equipment and technology, such as an electronic table magnifier and a screen reader software – JAWS (Job Access with Speech). I remember it was in late October 2020, the University of Wroclaw, Poland. As a routine, I visited the library within my academic institution. Upon assuming my seat, the head librarian approached my table. She addressed me as "Pani," which is a Polish term used to refer to a woman as "Miss" or "Mrs." She informed me that a table with a personal computer had been set up for me. I expressed my astonishment and enquired, "What specific table?" Subsequently, she guided me to a different table, a considerable distance from my customary spot. A larger square table was equipped with an electronic table magnifier and computer, and a screen reader called JAWS was installed. It is true that to avoid attention, I typically occupied the final desk in the library. I relied on my antiquated and partially damaged handheld mechanical magnifier when reading and using my laptop. Nevertheless, an observant librarian detected it despite my attempts to conceal it.

### *Video Magnifier*

According to Bhaskar et al. (2022), visually impaired individuals experience increased effort and longer work hours when they cannot access assistive technology. Moreover, Rosner and Perlman (2018) found that computer-based assistive device users exhibit more motivation and independence than non-users. Considering the abovementioned scientific conclusions, I would like to recount my personal experience in Poland in mid-February 2020. I was getting ready to go to the faculty. The programme coordinator rang me up and asked that I remain in my dormitory. This phone call took me aback. After a few hours, she arrived carrying a large box. Inside the box, there was a device - a video magnifier. We initiated an exploration of the device's various capabilities and operational procedures by perusing its instructional book. Before departing my room, she said, "The programme decided to acquire this device, expecting it to aid you in your readings". Despite not being obligated to offer us (fellows) assistive devices, the programme displayed kindness and compassion by purchasing a video magnifier, which I have been using up to this day.

### *Individual Study Room*

I remember it was at the end of April 2022, at the National University of Malaysia. Despite the main library's five floors offering convenient study facilities, I was still looking for suitable seating areas to continue my work. It may seem funny or unbelievable, but it is true that for over a month, I tried to locate a suitable spot on every desk at every level. The issue was lighting. Because of the disruptive reflection, I could not read and use my laptop (a computer provided by the library). The screen and keyboard were so reflective that it hindered my vision ability. I had difficulty locating the cursor on the screen and spent approximately 10-15 minutes attempting to do so. Finally, I decided to disclose my vision impairment to the library staff. I informed them about my challenges with lighting and the requirement to administer my medication, specifically eye drops, every 3-4 hours. After a brief period, they arranged a cosy study room equipped with a personal computer, allowing me to customise the lighting and periodically administer my eye drops entirely.

### 2. Career Development

Reasonable accommodations have also been found to impact workplace productivity (Bhaskar et al. 2022; Blanco, 2021), job performance (Bhaskar et al. 2022; Blanco, 2021; Dong et al. 2017, 2021; McDonnall & Lund, 2020), and job stability (Blanco, 2021) positively. It has also been identified as a critical factor in the career development of visually impaired individuals, allowing them to achieve the same level of success as their sighted counterparts (Bhaskar et al. 2022). According to Dong and Guerette (2013), sensory-impaired employees who requested reasonable accommodation demonstrated superior job performance compared to those who did not.

Bhaskar et al. (2022) stressed that the key factors contributing to the success of visually impaired personnel in their careers include their perseverance, advocacy for their rights, resilience in the face of rejection and scepticism, ability to adapt to the sighted environment, knowledge of the perspectives of sighted individuals and strong belief in the power of technology - assistive technologies. Simply put, the career aspirations of visually impaired individuals resulted from receiving feedback, challenging preconceptions connected to their disability, and maintaining a good attitude. Productivity, happiness, and health were considered the key indicators of professional sustainability. Additionally, he found that individuals with vision impairments had a greater inclination to pursue job success than those without vision impairments. Visually impaired individuals generally like to be treated as successful rather than defined solely by their vision impairment.

### *Presenter of The Country*

It was at the beginning of December 2018, in Iran. To be chosen from a pool of candidates for the prestigious international educational event in the enchanting city of Iran - Isfahan, I created a poster that explores the significance of traditional and digital education systems in the modern world. The event was meticulously organised and attracted people from both local and international backgrounds. Out of the 91 participants from different countries, I was the only one representing Uzbekistan among the chosen international attendees. The flag of Uzbekistan was at the top of the well-decorated building due to my participation, namely the attendance of a person with a disability.

### *The Opportunity to do PhD at the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia*

High workplace performance among individuals with impaired vision can significantly contribute to professional growth, long-term employability, job security, positive relationships with employers and colleagues, access to reasonable accommodations, and overcoming various workplace obstacles (Blanco, 2021; Bleach, 2022; Garcia et al. 2022; Gupta et al. 2021; Kim, 2015; United Nations, 2015; WHO, 2022a). Consequently, the unemployment rate for visually impaired individuals can increase because of their poor job performance. Employers are often reluctant to hire and retain underperforming employees, particularly if they have disabilities (Carvalho-Freitas & Stathi, 2017; Makkawy & Long, 2021; McDonnall & Lund, 2020).

Due to my exceptional job performance, I was granted a fully supported scholarship to pursue a PhD at UKM. It was 16 October 2021 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan - yet another memorable day in my professional life. The Academy of Public Administration conference hall under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan was filled with many people, including authorities. I was invited to attend a prestigious ceremony where I was honoured for winning the "El-yurt Umidi" (in Uzbek "Hope of the Nation") foundation competition. As the chosen applicants, we were grateful that the government allowed us to acquire comprehensive knowledge and expertise by studying at the top 300 universities globally. I could not conceal my smile, emotions, sentiments, and joy within my heart. Enrolling at UKM, Malaysia's most esteemed public university, presented a remarkable opportunity to pursue a PhD in Human Development.

### 3. Psychological Well-Being

Reasonable accommodation can increase job satisfaction (Dong et al. 2021), motivation (Rosner & Perlman, 2018), independence and self-sufficiency (Blanco, 2021; Rosner & Perlman, 2018) among visually impaired individuals. In turn, the main factor contributing to stress and exhaustion among those with vision impairment was the absence of suitable accommodations (Makkawy & Long, 2021).

Sensory-impaired individuals who sought and requested reasonable accommodations but did not receive them had a more robust perception that these accommodations could improve their job performance than their peers who never sought them. However, persons with a strong belief in the impact of accommodation on their performance were likelier to obtain it. In contrast, those with a weaker belief often requested it but have yet to receive it. Additionally, sensory-impaired individuals who have a strong belief in their abilities, high expectations of positive outcomes, a good understanding of the necessary steps to obtain accommodations for their professional goals, high job satisfaction, and work in an environment that is supportive of disabilities were more likely to receive accommodations compared to those who requested accommodations but did not receive them, as well as those who did not make any accommodation requests at all (Dong et al. 2021; Dong & Guerette, 2013).

Furthermore, the job satisfaction of visually impaired individuals in Pakistan increased due to their rising monthly salaries (Zaheer et al. 2022). The primary factor contributing to the psychological well-being of individuals with vision impairment in India was the acceptance of their sighted colleagues (Bhaskar et al. 2022). Nevertheless, because of the educational disruptions, Korean visually impaired individuals with childhood-onset disabilities experienced lower vocational well-being than those with adult-onset disabilities (Jeon et al. 2022). In addition, unlike the general population, individuals with vision impairments had a greater degree of sad mood. Depressive mood can arise not only from the stress of daily life and prejudice based on disability but also from the stress specifically related to the disability itself. The level of depression decreased when individuals with vision impairments had satisfaction in their interactions with their family and friends (Kim & Park, 2023).

#### *Strong Self-Efficacy*

Visually impaired individuals with a strong belief in their abilities (self-efficacy) (Dong et al. 2021) and a sense of assurance in themselves (self-confidence) (Kim, 2015) have greater ambition, motivation, and satisfaction. In this matter, I want to share my narratives. I have always harboured a solid inclination to further my growth by acquiring knowledge and experience. Having recognised the correlation, personal development can result in the advancement of committees, regions, and ultimately the entire society. Acquiring knowledge from foreign experiences presented a valuable opportunity to accomplish it. To do this, I took the initiative to develop English language proficiency myself, as I could not afford the services of a tutor. Finally, I acquired proficiency in the English language through reading literature and viewing instructional videos. Subsequently, I submitted applications for scholarship programs that cover all expenses. I diligently submitted my application forms and supplementary papers, including a motivation letter, medical reports, recommendation letters, cover letters, and an updated CV, a total of 58 times for various scholarship programs. Despite submitting my documents 58 times, I was only awarded 6 fully funded scholarship programs. I have been granted admission to the ITEC program in

India for the second consecutive time. On three occasions, I was unsuccessful in my application to the MASHAV program (Israel), but on the fourth attempt, I was granted admission and received an acceptance letter. Despite needing formal instruction on applying for scholarships, I have acquired firsthand knowledge and expertise in this area. The rejections I received from the programs provided me with valuable insights. I enjoy imparting my expertise to individuals keen on obtaining scholarships.

### *Firm Decision*

It was in the middle of December 2018, in Israel. We visited the hospital where youngsters diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder were admitted and received medical care. The hospital was outfitted with state-of-the-art technologies. Due to its vast expanse, we dedicated the entire day to exploring it. The elderly, slender, Jewish gentleman guided us in introducing the nature of autism as a disorder, explaining the treatment procedures and showing various medical equipment. By the conclusion of that day, we together captured numerous photographs. Due to my curiosity, I enquired about his role at the hospital. I was intrigued by his extensive knowledge of autism, autism-related technology, and the hospital's treatment and operational protocols. This led me to believe that he held a prominent position. Nevertheless, I held a different opinion based on his attire and fashion sense. In response to my inquiry, he stated, "I have previously served as an ambassador and am presently engaged as a volunteer at this hospital." He served as an Israeli ambassador to a European country (but now I cannot remember which specific country it was).

The volunteer man exemplified the ideal way to contribute to his nation. Not knowing himself, that man imparted to me the profound lesson that imperceptible activities have the potential to yield tangible changes and prosperity. At that time, I made a firm decision in my life. I committed to actively enhancing the working environment and amenities for Uzbek employees with disabilities. I am familiar with the nature of disability and health limits and acknowledge the challenges of performing a job at the same level as individuals without disabilities.

### *Overcoming Depression*

It was at the beginning of February 2020, in Wroclaw, Poland. Due to my insurance coverage for contemporary and fully equipped medical facilities, I scheduled an appointment with an ophthalmologist. Despite my thorough understanding of my eyesight condition, I decided to visit to avoid potential self-reproach in the future, such as wondering whether there were any surgical treatment options available. There was a long crew at the medical centre. Upon my turn, a courteous woman with an exquisite grin at the registration counter instructed me to proceed to a designated room for initial medical assessments, including ocular pressure measurement.

Following the 5-hour examination, the ophthalmologist briefly fixed their gaze upon me without saying a word. Nevertheless, her benevolent expression conveyed a clear message: "I apologise, Miss. Medical intervention is incapable of resolving your ocular problem." Breaking the silence in the room, I enquired about the precise state of my eyes. "Care of your eyes as your vision ability is currently less than fifteen per cent," she cautioned, averting her gaze from me. These words caused me to become immobile. I was unable to recall her exact words at that moment. I anticipated various outcomes, but I did not foresee the complete loss of my vision. On the following day, I woke up earlier. I said: "There is no time to indulge in distress. There are no serious reasons for feeling disappointed." Then, I was engaged in my daily responsibilities.

### **Conclusion**

Individuals with various poor health conditions and disabilities encounter workplace difficulties more compared to those without such issues. Nevertheless, by establishing a workplace environment that accommodates individuals with disabilities, they can effectively carry out their job responsibilities at the necessary level and, in some cases, even beyond the anticipated level of performance. Offering appropriate accommodations for eligible individuals with disabilities is a prominent way of establishing a workplace environment supporting people with

disabilities. Providing appropriate accommodations is a crucial step in promoting workplace productivity, job performance, and career development and enhancing motivation, self-efficacy, and psychological well-being for those with disabilities, including those who are visually impaired.

To foster a workplace atmosphere that is more inclusive and supportive for those with visual impairments, it is recommended that training sessions and informational campaigns be conducted using mass media channels, posters, brochures, etc. to educate employers and coworkers. Lack of information about matters related to blindness is the main cause of creating a workplace climate that is not inclusive and lacks assistance. Furthermore, it is crucial to ensure that individuals who are fully blind (with a vision ability of 0-3 per cent) and those who are nearly blind (with a vision ability of 4-8 per cent), particularly researchers and teachers, have access to Braille-based technologies and materials. These include Braille printers, Braille displays, Braille layouts, Braille textbooks/books, Braille journals, Braille posters, and Braille maps. It is essential to offer voice-based technologies and materials, such as talking traffic lights, talking buses, speaking canes, computers equipped with screen readers, audiobooks, journals with audio capabilities, and talking maps and globes, to cater to the needs of individuals who are fully blind, nearly blind, or have low vision (with a visual ability ranging from 9% to 20%). Individuals with low vision should be equipped with magnifiers, such as mechanical, electronic, or video magnifiers. These resources should be available at Blind societies, libraries for the visually impaired, and educational or work environments where fully blind, nearly blind, and individuals with low vision are present.

Considering that autoethnography is a unique method of qualitative research, future studies should focus on workplace difficulties that are more prevalent among visually impaired individuals. An autoethnographic exploration of workplace obstacles should be conducted based on the level of visual acuity: complete blindness, almost blindness, or low vision. This is because persons with varying levels of vision face distinct workplace challenges unique to their specific circumstances.

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