Profile of public workers with disability from a federal education institution: use of assistive technology*

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Perfil de servidores com deficiência de uma instituição federal de ensino: uso de tecnologia assistiva

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http://dx.doi.org/10.11606/issn.2238-6149.v27i2p156-164

Seabra-Silva M, Toyoda CY, Pelosi MB, Silva NR. Profile of public workers with disability from a federal education institution: use of assistive technology. Rev Ter Ocup Univ São Paulo. 2016 May-Aug.;27(2):156-64.

ABSTRACT: The objective of this study was to characterize disabled public workers of a Federal Higher Education Institution, and check their perceptions regarding functionality, autonomy, and satisfaction at work. Nine technical and administrative public workers with disability participated. They joined IFES between 2000 and 2012 through a public assessment with positions intended for people with disabilities. Two instruments have been applied: Functional Independence Measure (MIF, Medida de Independência Funcional) and a semi-structured interview. In the analysis of the MIF, participants obtained modified independence scores and total independence; seven respondents made use of assistive technology (AT) in their daily lives, and only one was specific to work. They were all satisfied with its performance and think they do not require another device. Respondents have mild deficiencies and high level of education. There is an urgent need for a broader policy especially for people with moderate and severe disabilities, so that they can enter the labor market and exercise their citizenship.

KEYWORDS: Work; Disabled persons; Occupational therapy; Self-help devices; Workers.

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RESUMO: O objetivo do estudo foi caracterizar servidores com deficiência de uma Instituição Federal de Ensino Superior e verificar sua percepção em relação à funcionalidade, autonomia e satisfação em relação ao trabalho. Participaram nove servidores técnico-administrativos com deficiência que ingressaram na IFES entre 2000 e 2012, por meio de concurso público com vagas destinadas a pessoas com deficiência. Foram aplicados dois instrumentos: Medida de Independência Funcional (MIF) e uma entrevista semi-estruturada. Na análise da MIF os participantes obtiveram *escores* de *independência modificada* e *independência total*; sete entrevistados fazem uso de tecnologia Assistiva (TA) no cotidiano e somente um, específico para o trabalho. Todos se mostraram satisfeitos com seu desempenho e acham que, não necessitam de outro recurso. Os entrevistados têm deficiências leves e alto nível de escolarização. É urgente uma política mais ampla especialmente para as pessoas com deficiências moderadas e graves, para que possam ingressar no mercado de trabalho e exercer sua cidadania.

DESCRITORES: Pessoas com deficiência; Terapia ocupacional; Equipamentos de autoajuda; Trabalhadores.

*Part of the data from a PhD paper on Special Education - Universidade Federal de São Carlos, UFSCar. Title: Characterization of public workers with disability from a Federal Higher Education Institution, 2013.

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INTRODUCTION

People with disabilities and inclusion in the labor market

The participation of people with disabilities in educational and social environments have barriers, in particular regarding integration into work. The professional integration of people with disabilities in Brazil constitutes a major challenge, however, it is possible to highlight advances in legislation during inspection processes, which have provided access to the labor market. Pastore[1] points out that the presence of a centered vision on limitations, related to lack of efficiency acts negatively on employability.

The market logic values productivity, profit, results, competitiveness, speed, and low cost. Oliveira[2] points out, between the pillars of capitalism, the relentless development of technological innovations and the search for productivity, with consequent precariousness of working conditions. In this context, the person with disabilities will find many obstacles to enter the labor market.

In addition to that there is the strong cultural bias of philanthropy in relation to people with disabilities, that according to Melo[3] leads to discrimination and to difficulties in accessing the labor market. Despite that, people with disabilities are seeking space in the labor market, and fighting for their rights. An important legal device aimed at the expansion of the offer of job opportunities and the conquest of a job is the article 93 of Act 8213/91, known as Quota Law for the Disabled[4] which provides for the reservation of jobs for persons with disabilities in the competitive market, and states that:

> ... companies with 100 (one hundred) or more employees are obliged to fill from 2 to 5% of their job positions with rehabilitated beneficiaries, or disabled people trained, in the following ratio: up to 200 employees: 2%; 201 to 500: 3%; 501 to 1,000: 4%; 1,001 on: 5%[1].

Eight years after the publication of this law, on December 21, 1999, Federal Decree nº. 3298/99[5] was published, establishes quotas in public work assessments for people with disabilities, which aims to preserve rights of equality in the selection process with the other candidates and provides for minimum reserve of 5% of the vacancies.

The hiring of people with disabilities has been growing, and is also bound to the application of fines on companies that do not comply with the law, though only 0.73% (357,797) of persons with disabilities were formally working in Brazil in the year 2013, representing an increase of 8.33% compared to the year 2012[6].

Among the main obstacles to hiring people with disabilities, we can mention the low education and qualification levels added to lack of experience[7,8], in addition to the lack of training services. We highlight that compliance with the law most of the time occurs to avoid fines, which may favor the placement in work environments that do not provide conditions for the appropriate professional performance, in positions considered simple, sometimes isolated, and with low pay[9]. Pereira and Passerino[10] found that most participants in the research were given compensations of up to two minimum wages.

According to Cruz[11] the concept of inclusion is linked to personal autonomy, defined as the ability of the subject to stand by him/herself, without relying on the help from other people. Thus, the principles of solidarity, individual respect, and universality are the basis of the proposed model of personal autonomy, and seek to offer similar opportunities to all people. Also considering the need of society to ensure accessibility by means of structural changes in architectural spaces.

Law nº. 7.853/89[12] states, in Art. 2nd, section III, item "d", that it is up to the government and its agencies to ensure people with disabilities the full exercise of their fundamental rights, including the right to work in suitable conditions, to achieve compliance with specific legislation and adopt the provision of job opportunities for these people in the entities of the public administration and the private sector. The regulation by editing the Single Legal Regime of Civil Servants of the Union is highlighted[13], Law nº. 8112 of 12/11/90, in which Art. 5, § 2 states:

> People with disabilities are ensured the right to enroll in the public assessment for provision of positions whose duties are compatible with the disability that they portray; for such people until 20% (twenty per cent) of the job positions offered in the assessment will be reserved[13].

The legislation is one of the elements to ensure the rights of citizens, but does not guarantee its achievement, which has been the object of struggle of the different actors involved, i.e. disabled persons, representative entities, and professionals. In that sense, it is necessary to monitor the implementation of legislation, in addition to providing necessary support to the population with disabilities which entered the formal labor market.

Assistive Technology and the work of disabled people

The work is not limited to the acquisition of their own provisioning means, it is an activity that requires investment of significant part of people's lives, being the basis of social inclusion. It contributes to the construction of identity, of belonging to the world, and in leading a meaningful life[14].

Madrid Statement[15] proposes access to employment as an essential condition for social inclusion of the disabled person as one of its eight axes:

> Special efforts need to be made to promote access of people with disabilities to employment, preferably in the competitive labor market. This is one of the important ways to fight the social exclusion of persons with disabilities and promote their dignity and independent life. That requires an active mobilization not only of the advocates of social inclusion, but also from public authorities, who need to continue to strengthen appropriate measures already in place (p. 5)[15].

Among the actions proposed in this document, we suggest to employers that make efforts for inclusion, maintenance, and promotion of people with disabilities in their employees frame.

Although the legislation and recommendations extend the possibilities of professional insertion and can be pointed as major achievements, there are countless strategies for employers to circumvent the law, as making public assessments with shortened shelf life, and fewer number of job positions (less than five positions per assessment), which relieves the "reservation of positions". One can observe there is a resistance from companies to the enforcement of the legislation[16] and the adoption of measures to postpone, extend, and even obtain exemption regarding its compliance[17].

There is resistance to the enforcement of legislation, with the adoption of measures to postpone, extend and even achieve exemption from compliance with it[17].

Another important aspect to highlight is the assistive technology resources and services that can provide the performance of persons with disabilities and their access, permanence, and rise in the labor market.

Assistive Technology is defined as: "features and services offered to people of all ages who have special needs as a result of motor, sensory, cognitive, or communication difficulties", and covers alternative mobility, posture; computer access, adaptations for activities of daily living and to work; accessibility and environmental adaptation; adaptations of equipment for leisure and recreation, and alternative and expanded communication[18,19].

The Occupational Therapist, as a member of the multidisciplinary team of Assistive Technology, is the professional responsible for the prescription, adaptation, and monitoring of the use of assistive technology resource, verifying the user's satisfaction and professional (re) placement. According to the document from the III The Integral Subsystem Units Workshop for the Health Care of the Public Worker (SIASS)[20], the Occupational Therapist has the following functions:

> - Organize and supervise the occupational therapy programs in the process of re-adaptation;
> - Evaluate and formulate an opinion on the situation of re-adaptation and rehabilitation programs and the evolution of the treatment of the deficiencies of the public workers;
> - Conduct research to broaden the theoretical knowledge applied in the field of Occupational Therapy and Ergonomics within the SIASS;
> - Run programs of occupational therapy methods and techniques to restore and develop the physical and mental capacity of the public workers (p. 8).

The importance of services are is significant and constitutes one of the components of the definition of the very concept of Assistive Technology.

OBJECTIVES

The general objective of this study was to characterize disabled public workers of a Federal Higher Education Institution (IFES, *Instituição Federal de Ensino Superior*), and check their perceptions regarding functionality, autonomy, and satisfaction at work. The objective was also to verify the functionality/occupational performance of participants, with the use of Assistive Technology.

METHOD

This is a cross-sectional descriptive survey and qualitative-quantitative approach with non-probability sample. The sample was defined by a criterion of convenience. Inclusion criteria included: a) public workers with disabilities; b) admitted through public assessment in positions intended in accordance with the Federal Decree No. 3298/99; c) subjects working in the host city of IFES.

Exclusion criteria were public workers with disabilities who joined before 1999; that have acquired the disability after admission at IFES; with disabilities, but who joined through the wide-ranging competition; working in units outside the host city.

Participants

Nine active public workers from the technical-administrative frame with disabilities have participated, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 – Initial data of the disabled public workers admitted after 1999

PP[1]	Position	Class[2]	Admission[3]	Deficiency	Working campus
P 01	Adm. Assistant	D	12/30/2009	Physical disability	Engineering
P02	Adm. Assistant	D	12/30/2009	Physical disability	Dean Office
P 03	Adm. Assistant	D	12/30/2009	Low vision	Biological Areas
P 04	Librarian	E	02/14/2011	Physical disability	Humanities
P 05	Adm. Assistant	D	04/02/2012	Deafness	Pharmacy
P 06	Adm. Assistant	D	04/02/2012	Deafness	Dean Office
P07	Adm. Assistant	D	04/02/2012	Unilateral vision	Humanities
P 08	Adm. Assistant	D	04/02/2012	Physical disability	Humanities
P 09	Nursing Technician	D	04/04/2012	Unilateral vision	University Hospital

Note: [1]Participant; [2]C = basic level education/ D = high school education level/ E = graduate education level; [3]Date of Admission at IFES

Research location

Federal Institution of Higher Education located in the state of Rio de Janeiro with approximately 7,500 employees among technical administrative and faculty workers (data updated in July 2012). Of those, 1,444 have been admitted after 2000. IFES's workers are spread in one host city and in other 14 external centers.

Instruments

Two evaluation tools were used for data collection:

1) Functional Independence Measure (MIF, *Medida de Independência Funcional*). Validated instrument in Brazil that evaluates the degree of independence in activities of daily lives of subjects with functional restrictions. Among the activities scored are: bath, dressing, transfers, locomotion, toilet control, memory, social interaction, problem solving, etc.[21] 2) Semi-Structured Interview: aimed at understanding the participant's relations with the work and the labor dynamics. The following issues were addressed: name, age, education, marital status, job title, type of disability (physical, visual, hearing, whether total or partial, congenital or acquired) and makes use of Assistive Technology. Issues related to activities such as: time in the institution, satisfaction at work, in which function the person was admitted, difficulty in exercising the function, if he/she makes use of assistive technology at work (its effectiveness or not), valuation mechanisms at work were also investigated.

Procedures for data collection

Nineteen technical-administrative workers have been identified with disabilities within the framework of active workers who joined the service through the reservation of positions for people with disabilities. They were invited to participate in the research identified by the data found by joining two sources (researcher data and Accessibility Center data, a body linked to the Human

Resources service of the Institution). Of the 19 servers located, five were working outside the headquarters, two were not located, two were on holiday, one was with the incorrect admission date, and his interview has been dropped. Nine workers that met the prerequisites of this research were located and agreed to participate in the study.

After locating the participants, telephone contact was made, and the interview was scheduled in a more convenient location to the participant. Before data collection, research particpants signed an informed consent form. Project approved by the Research Ethics Committee of UNESP, Opinion 1113/2014 of October 22, 2014.

Data Analysis

1) Functional Independence Measure

MIF data were analyzed and classified according to the instrument manual. The instrument is composed of 18 items that are scored from one to seven, with a maximum total score of 126, but its items are also evaluated separately. In the end, from the sum of the scores, a score is obtained that rates the degree of functionality of the subject: the level of one to five considers the subject presents modified dependency; six refers to modified independence, and seven refers to complete independence.

2) Semi-Structured Interview

The semi-structured interview was analyzed by the method of content analysis[32]. The workers were assigned a code, then a full reading and transcription of the interviews was made, which were organized into the following categories: satisfaction/performance in relation to the work; assistive technology resource usage during work, and difficulties to perform the current function. The representative excerpts were selected per worker and were inserted into thematic categories.

RESULTS

Participants' Profile

General data of each participant are shown in Table 2.

In relation to the position class, only one participant was admitted in an upper-level position, and eight participants were admitted in high school-related positions.

As to the type of disability, of the nine participants who joined by position reservation, four had physical disabilities, three had visual impairment, and two had hearing issues.

Table 2 – Characterization of the disabled public workers admitted after 1999

Profile	Sex	Age	Type of Deficiency	Deficiency	Education	IFES Time	Satisfaction
P 01	F	45	Physical	Acquired at 18 y.o.	Post--Grad	3 years	yes
P02	M	60	Physical	Acquired at 55 y.o.	Higher	3 years	yes
P 03	M	33	Visual	Congenital	Post-Grad	3 years	no
P 04	F	41	Auditive	Acquired in childhood	Higher	8 months	yes
P 05	M	37	Auditive	Acquired at 30 y.o.	Post-Grad	8 months	no
P 06	M	33	Physical	Acquired at 23 y.o.	Higher	1 year and 8 months	yes
P07	F	30	Visual	Acquired at 3 y.o.	Higher	9 months	yes
P 08	F	28	Physical	Acquired at 18 y.o.	Higher	6 months	no
P 09	M	32	Visual	Acquired at 25 y.o.	Higher	9 months	yes

In relation to the level of education, all survey respondents have higher level. As for the length of service in the institution, all servers are probationary.

Functional Independence Measure

The nine participants evaluated obtained independence scores from modified to full independence in almost all items, except P06, who presented a measurement of five in the "moving through stairs" item and presented a measurement of five in P08, "social interaction" item. The overall result, participants P03, P09, and P07 were classified as fully independent, and other participants as independent with modifications, according to Table 3.

Table 3 – Functional Independence Measure Result

MIF	TOTAL	DEGREE
P01	118	6
P02	124	6
P03	126	7
P04	123	6
P05	124	6
P06	125	6
P07	126	7
P08	120	6
P09	126	7
Average	123.5	**6.4**

MIF results demonstrate very high scores; all workers have the ability to perform self-care autonomously. It should be noted that participants have mild disabilities. P04, who presents bilateral deafness, just needs to use hearing aids to talk in a low tone of voice. P06 has partial amputation of the femur that caused a hip slope of 3 cm, and the participant maintains his walking function preserved, including climbing up and down stairs.

Semi-Structured Interview

Themed categories of the interview

In relation to satisfaction/achievement regarding the work, it was reported that the degree of satisfaction of the participants is connected with the support and appreciation received by colleagues and supervisors and the possibilities for growth. P03, P05, and P08, showed dissatisfaction in relation to work (Chart 1).

Chart 1 – Description of the main causes of dissatisfaction of the public workers with disabilities regarding the work

P03: "I do not feel accomplished, but I would be if some ideas were used, for example, the article I made for post-graduate school. People think who takes part in public work assessments does that in order to not do anything, but it is a mistake, because nowadays people want to work."

P05: "I feel I could contribute more, but I didn't have the training to engage in these activities. In fact, the public perception is that anyone who acts in Administrative functions has no clear definition of the activities to be developed."

P08: "Well, I missed training. I'm the secretary of the building, deal with funds (daily and tickets) and the system is very difficult and generates stress. And I also don't feel accomplished because I went to college and studied many years of my life, so I intend to take another public work assessment in the future to change my life."

You can see in the interviews that although they find it difficult to perform their professional activities, other aspects contribute to demotivation, highlighting lack of appreciation, no movement from management to provide suitable conditions for the development of activities and potential of the workers.

Most participants referred to satisfaction with the work, expressed feelings of professional achievement and motivation to confront the difficulties and challenges in the daily work. They have also revealed that they feel valued by colleagues and included in the work, being treated equal to the workers in the industry.

In relation to the use of assistive technology resources and difficulties in carrying out the work, the results are presented in Table 4. Seven participants reported that they make use of Assistive Technology in their daily lives. Of those, only P05 uses specific features to work, but reported the need to purchase a hearing aid that best suits his needs. The others were all satisfied with their performance and think they do not require another device. It is pointed out that P01, diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, feels insecure when conducting external activities. However, she has a gratified function of manager of the Institute's building in which she works. As she presents the imbalance when walking, she does not feel comfortable going out alone on the street, and thus, when she needs to perform an external activity her mother, who is retired, comes with her. When asked if she could use a cane, she replied that she would rather go with mother.

Table 4 – Result on the use of Assistive Technology reported by the Participants

TA	Do you use it?	Which one?	Is it enough?	Any remarks?
P01	Yes.	Low shoes closed at the heel	No.	The mother escorts him/her when performing external activities.
P02	Yes.	Urostomy bag.	Yes.	No.
P03	Yes.	Increases the screen font	Yes	No.
P04	Yes.	Hearing aid.	Yes.	No.
P05	Yes.	Takes recorder to meetings.	No.	Testing hearing aids.
P06	Yes.	Insole for leveling the hips.	Yes.	No.
P07	No.			RE has 100% visual acuity; the worst difficulty is to see from afar.
P08	No.			Hips prosthesis will be needed in the future.
P09	Yes.	Corrective lenses (13º RE) + position for puncturing veins + eye drops	Yes.	Font 24 is used for computer reading. Out of the hospital there is the use of rigid lenses, which flatten the cornea.

DISCUSSION

In relation to the profile of the participants, although a small sample that does not allow generalization, the results keep similarity with the data of the census conducted by IBGE on 2010, that points to approximately 46% of the total disabled (with motor and/or sensory limitations, not to mention intellectually disabled) have physical disability, 32% have severe visual impairment, and 21% have severe hearing deficiency[22]. This document reveals that the majority of people with disabilities at work are physically disabled (181,464), followed by hearing impaired (78,078), rehabilited (33,928), visually impaired (33,505), intellectually impaired (25,332), and with multiple disabilities (5,490)[22]. In the same direction, the data of this research points to the prevalence of disabled people as expressed in the RAIS[6].

People with disabilities tend to have higher level of education, especially the mild cases[23]. This is the case of the workers who participated in the research, all featuring mild deficiency.

In relation to the level of education, all participants have higher level, three post-graduate, six acquired disability in adulthood after completing high school; two in childhood, and one reported that it is congenital.

As for the length of service in the institution, all servers are probationary. This data can be related to the fact of six servers reporting that they are satisfied with the work. According to Chiavenato[24] the more recent the employment relation, the greater the level of satisfaction of the subject, probably due to the motivation of a new beginning, and the absence of wearing issues accumulated with the company.

The group studied is singular because the workers have a mild deficiency level, and do not require major adjustments in the workplace. All that required any resource already had it before being hired as employees and such features were considered simple.

Another particularity is that they are persons with disabilities and who have high level of education, which according to Doval[25] are the ones that have real chances to enter and remain in the labor market. However, despite the high level of education, it was noted that participants only managed to join the IFES due to the reservation of positions, i.e. the notes they obtained in the contests were lower than the last placed by wide competition. Besides, seven participants use some type of assistive technology resource, but only one uses it exclusively at work. This suggests that the Law of Quotas was essential for the admission of these workers in IFES. However, the number of participants of the research does not allow to determine if the presence of deficiency would be an obstacle to the approval of free competition, i.e., out of the reservation of positions due to the high demand for public assessments.

You can assume that there is a preference in the labor market for mild deficiencies associated with the absence or reduced need for investment in infrastructure. In this sense, there is an urgent need for a broader policy to dedicate special attention to people who present major issues, as the moderate and severe deficiencies, as they also have the right to work and live in fullness.

Research shows that even with high education level, it was observed that the lack of support, of providing conditions for the realization of the activity effectively constituted elements that hampered the professional insertion. Lorenzo[9] indicates advances in the image that companies have in relation to the admission of the person with disabilities, but points out that what still prevails is the vision focused on disability, the limitation, the ignorance of the real potential, denoting the set of aspects involved in the relationship work-disability.

FINAL REMARKS

Despite the visible and indisputable advances in recent years, we still need to continue fighting for the inclusion of the person with disabilities in the labor market, either through the qualification of health team for the worker in the companies; applying and demanding the enforcement of legislation, advising employers and managers about the needs and benefits of environmental, attitudinal and technological adaptations, training and qualifying the disabled worker (through continued education, short-term courses, and overall career plan), implementing assistive technology resources to facilitate the implementation of activities at work. In that sense, the Occupational Therapy has an important contribution to the integration/inclusion of the person with disabilities in labor-related environments.

Thus, the potential of people with disabilities to perform their work in an efficient, competitive, productive, and no longer passively and paternalistic manner are broadened, that is, the disabled will be building his/her identity as legitimate, accomplished, and active citizens.

This research presents results that can contribute to the theme of the professional integration of people with disabilities at work, even if there was a small sample studied with mixed education characteristics that would be very different from national reality, which makes the generalization of data more difficult, but does not invalidate their contributions. It is an area that is little studied, which needs new researches that address a bigger universe of participants and other related and/or complementary studies issues.

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Received: 30.10.15
Accepted: 13.01.16