



# Framework to create opportunities to maximize the contribution of differently abled employees in the Sri Lankan garment industry

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## Abstract

The primary focus of this study was on Differently Abled Employees' (DAEs) work performance within Sri Lanka's garment industry. Prior research revealed inadequate awareness among organizations regarding the provision of employment opportunities for DAEs. Notably, DAEs constitute a substantial portion of the economically inactive working-age population in Sri Lanka. In this setting, the study aimed to identify the crucial factors influencing the contribution of DAEs in the Sri Lankan garment industry. In this setting, the study sought to measure their impact and develop a framework that supports both DAEs and the garment industry, fostering a mutually beneficial work environment. Utilizing a mixed approach, the study encompassed a sample population of 270 DAEs. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews and a Likert scale questionnaire. Convenience sampling was deployed to interview 14 DAEs, while a sample of 159 DAEs was selected through simple random sampling for the distribution of the questionnaire. Thematic analysis and multiple linear regression analysis were employed to analyze qualitative and quantitative data. The results underscored the significance of the examined factors affecting DAEs' contributions. Based on regression analysis results, the researchers developed a framework, which underwent further refinement through reviews and discussions. The findings proposed supportive strategies to achieve the overarching objective of the study to maximize DAEs' contributions in the workplace.

**Keywords** Differently abled people · Differently abled employees · Disability · Employee contribution · Garment industry · Job opportunities

## 1 Introduction

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD) defines persons with disabilities as those who have 'long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others' (UNCPRD 2006, pg4). Further, it

indicates that 14–15% of the world population which approximately accounts for half a billion people, experience some form of disability. Researchers have found that apart from physical disability, people can be disabled by environmental factors, stressing that disability is not merely about the medical concept of the body or functional impairment but refers to the interaction of a person and the environment (Vornholt et al. 2018). The most frequent types of disabilities among employees include vision impairment, deafness or hard of hearing, mental health conditions, intellectual disability, and physical disability (Ababneh 2016).

Statistically, most disabled persons are poor, as they lack access to education, health services, income-generating activities and wage employment. Hence, providing employment opportunities and empowering and safeguarding their lives could be valuable in minimizing the consequences or the issues they face. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) states that it is the right of a Differently Abled Person (DAP) to work or be employed with equal opportunities including the gain of a living, and acceptance in the labor market and the work environment (Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2006). However, barriers such as lack of access, wages, misconceptions about disability, discrimination, and overprotection in labor laws have hindered employment opportunities for DAPs (Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2006). Furthermore, due to these reasons, DAPs are trapped in this situation with no signs of recovery.

Sri Lanka Labor Force Survey 2019 has identified that 8.7% of the total labor force includes people with disability who fall into the category of the economically inactive population and out of them, only 29.4% are employed (Department of Census and Statistics 2019). In the current context, corporates encourage diversity strategies inclusive of disability employment. Employment of DAP has shown an increasing trend due to labor shortages, changes in societal perceptions, and legislative frameworks prevailing in the country. Even though insufficient organizational awareness has reduced employment opportunities for DAP, recognizing the value of Differently Abled Employees (DAE) is contingent upon assessing their productivity and efficiency within their roles. Notably, certain industries in Sri Lanka, including the garment sector, have instituted policies to offer targeted employment opportunities for DAP. For instance, this research focuses on a leading garment company in Sri Lanka, specifically examining plants within its operations that employ DAEs. The development of the Sri Lankan garment industry has been remarkable in terms of its contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP), foreign exchange earnings, export revenues and volumes, and employment generation (Welmilla 2020). However, the lack of labor becomes a challenging issue in the Sri Lankan garment industry due to the higher demand and expanded product lines in the garment industry. Therefore, employing DAEs and allowing them to participate in the labor force would make a substantial difference in the garment industry as well as the local economy. As per the Sri Lanka Export Development Board (EDB), the country earned the largest export revenue of US \$ 4 billion by garment exports in the year 2014 with a 9.6% growth. Notably, in the year 2022 amidst the economic crisis, the garment industry in Sri Lanka made a major contribution to the national economy to cushion against economic collapse. Hence, the need for greater appreciation of the diligent work, efforts, and contributions of all workers, including DAEs, is much felt.

As one of the research goals is to assess the overall involvement of Differently Abled Individuals (DAI) in contributing to organizational profits, the researchers have carefully selected companies within the garment industry as the study's sample. Furthermore, it is noted that there is limited literature addressing this phenomenon in the specific context of Sri Lanka, thereby highlighting the novelty and potential impact of this research. Besides,

employing DAP has been considered a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practice as it contributes to many stakeholders in society. For example, it provides employment opportunities for the unemployed, which in return helps reduce the unemployment rate in a country. Conversely, it opens avenues for DAPs to generate their income, reducing dependence on their families. It also strengthens them mentally, making them feel important with their contribution, due to actively participating in the workforce. From an economic and financial perspective, if the DAPs can be included in the labor force to make a positive contribution, it can ease the burden on the state in the long run, with lesser dependence on social support.

In the Sri Lankan context, according to the authors' knowledge, no research has been conducted on DAEs in the garment industry. Thus, filling the void in empirical research, this research creates a specific framework to generate employment opportunities for DAEs and uplift their engagement and contribution to the garment industry. In line with the purpose of this study, the researchers directly focus on the current performance of DAEs as well as the extent the employers have provided employment opportunities to them. In addition, DAEs' contribution to the industry will be evaluated considering five main crucial factors productivity level, product quality, job satisfaction, quality of work-life, and social recognition.

Researchers have developed three specific objectives to achieve the general objective, to develop a framework, and to create a win–win environment for both DAEs and the Sri Lankan garment industry.

The sub-objectives of the study are: (i) to identify the crucial factors that influence in contributing towards the garment industry by DAEs, (ii) to examine the impact of the crucial factors on the current play of DAEs in the Sri Lankan garment industry, (iii) to develop a framework that supports DAEs and the garment industry to create a win–win environment.

The paper is structured into several key sections. Section 2 highlights the extant literature, foundational variables, and concepts pertinent to the research issue. Following this, Sect. 3 outlines the research approach and methodology employed. Section 4 presents the results and facilitates discussion within the research context. Finally, the paper concludes by acknowledging its limitations, thereby offering a succinct yet comprehensive exploration of the subject matter.

## 2 Literature review

The literature review for this study was constructed by referring to relevant research from reputed databases such as ResearchGate, Emerald Insight, Google Scholar, Wiley Online Library, and Springer. The researchers identified 181 publications and limited websites that support the keywords of the study, which are: 'Differently abled people', 'differently abled employees', 'Disability', 'Employee contribution', and 'Job Opportunities'. However, during the screening process, only 143 publications satisfied the selection criteria and 38 were excluded due to overlapping publications, insufficient information, and irrelevancy to the topic. Further, from the screened publications, 86 were shortlisted and studied for full text based on their relevance to the research study. Accordingly, 78 publications were included to support the present study.

## 2.1 People with disabilities

Disability is generally a condition either caused by accident, trauma, genetics, or disease, which may restrict a person's mental processes, senses, or mobility (Vornholt et al. 2018). The laws of Sri Lanka recognize a person with disabilities, as one who, as a result of any deficiency in his physical or mental capabilities, whether congenital or not, is unable to ensure for himself, wholly or partly, the necessities of life. Further, as mentioned at the onset, the World Report on Disability estimates that more than 15% of the world population experiences some form of disability. Poverty and isolation are created due to a lack of education and opportunities to work, as the differently abled are disdained as people who cannot be relied on simply because of their disability. This situation can be remedied by providing employment opportunities, empowering, and safeguarding their future, thereby minimizing the problems DAEs face (Jayathilaka 2020). According to several researchers, workplace discrimination can occur in many aspects such as recruitment, pay, terms and conditions of employment, sickness absence, promotion opportunities, training opportunities, employee dismissal, and redundancy.

Work itself is important, as it contributes to employee well-being and self-esteem and provides one with an opportunity to contribute to society. But still, in most instances, work has not been accessible for people with disabilities (McDonnall 2019). This is even more valid considering the human resource landscape in Sri Lanka. Past researchers have reviewed in the global context, critical areas concerning this issue such as the facilities provided for DAEs (Ababneh 2016), views on human resource practices for disabled people/ people with disabilities (Kulkarni and Valk 2010), and employers' views when hiring DAPs (Bonaccio et al. 2020) as well as the local context, the local context, legal barriers affecting human resources management practices and workplace accommodation for the disabled people in Sri Lanka (Chandratilaka and Gamage 2021). Despite its importance, literature addressing this topic in the local setting is limited.

## 2.2 Employment of DAP in the garment industry

Employment is considered one of the basic human rights and has a vital role in humans' survival. Human capital is considered the most treasured asset in each organization (Kuruppu and Karunarathna 2021). Garment companies in the Sri Lankan garment industry have provided direct employment to 600,000 people in the country (Sri Lanka Export Development Board 2022). As the major industrial exporter of Sri Lanka, the garment industry provides abundant employment opportunities by considering people's skills, competencies, and knowledge capacity. However, the National Human Resources and Employment policy states that the sector has limited opportunities for vocational training and skills development. It further shows that although the opportunities mainly target the DAP with school education, the mechanisms to accept them into the labor market and absorb them into the permanent cadre have not been implemented yet. The negative attitude of society towards DAPs and the organization's reluctance to offer them employment opportunities have hindered the workforce participation of DAEs. Albrecht and Devlieger (1999) highlighted that the civility of a country is judged by how it treats its children, the disabled, and its poor and elderly citizens. Therefore, addressing these issues is not only important but also timely.

In recent times, many organizational tasks have been automated with technological advancements. It has also made life more challenging for humans to find work, as many companies are into automation. As a result, the number of unemployed populations has increased amid the highly competitive job market. In such instances, organizations may potentially overlook DAEs by categorizing them as lacking in education skills or self-efficacy. However, it is crucial to recognize their significance and evaluate their performance by transcending physical limitations. In general, an employee without any physical or mental disabilities may possess lower knowledge capacity and skills compared to DAEs. Only a few garment companies in Sri Lanka have already taken the initiative to employ DAEs, and thus take pride in having them in their workforce, contributing to a certain stage of the production process.

### 2.3 Productivity

Employee productivity measures the value produced by an individual worker over a given period. Productivity directly correlates with business outcomes and Return on Investment (ROI) and is contingent on the position of an employee, team, or department in relation to the internal average of the organization and a pre-established baseline; accordingly, it will be either high or poor. It is also an essential indicator of economic contribution. An employee's production during a specified time or given time can be used to measure employee productivity. An employee's performance will often be judged by benchmarking the average performance of workers who perform similar tasks. Organizations that provide employees with a compelling purpose, encourage goal achievement, and support overcoming challenges inspire heightened dedication. Consequently, when confronted with productivity targets, employees exert their utmost effort to surmount obstacles and fulfill their tasks within the designated timeframe, even without external incentive mechanisms such as rewards and prizes.

Especially in the garment industry, businesses calculate profitability by considering Standard Minute Value (SMV) and Earn Per Minute (EPM), which are often connected to productivity. Therefore, machine operators' productivity is incredibly important. While meeting deadlines is also crucial and impacts individual performance, it should not be at the expense of compromising the final product's quality.

Productivity can also be measured based on the work completed and the output achieved. Employee productivity can be assessed based on the number of tasks that each employee completes within the given period. Further, lead time is also crucial in production. Therefore, a deadline has been set for obtaining supply and starting production concurrently. The ability to complete an order within a specified time to satisfy client requests is unquestionably one of the key difficulties in outsourcing and the long-term worldwide marketing of the garment sector. For garment shops, the three factors of cost, quality, and lead time are crucial. However, one cannot discount the significance of completing a task promptly without compromising quality, because it may be perceived as a key priority for some buyers (Kader and Akter 2014).

Globally, limited studies have made attempts to assess the productivity of DAEs. Despite the paramount interest of employers in the DAEs' productivity, such studies are relatively scarce in comparison to those focused on able-bodied workers. In the Australian context, some researchers have used presence, job involvement, and the capacity to upgrade and create new sales to measure the productivity of contact center employees, with and without disabilities (Hindle et al. 2014). In the Philippines, some researchers have

evaluated the contrasting effects on the productivity of disabled employees with that of their peers. However, the real dimension of the root cause was not used in comparisons (Medrano et al. 2018). In this scenario, new opportunities will likely emerge for DAEs. Consequently, organizations can establish policies and undertake necessary actions, such as ensuring equal opportunities for DAEs without discrimination.

## 2.4 Quality of the product

Quality in the manufacturing context is generally realized as free from defects and significant variation by adhering to certain standards (Benavides and Van Landeghem 2015). Due to competitiveness, quality remains a critical factor in manufacturing. Several researchers also emphasize the need for “world-class” quality levels to fulfill today’s market demand as products and as such, processes have grown to be more complicated in nature. Especially in the garment industry, quality is an essential attribute that affects many key performance indicators of a company. Certain researchers emphasize that the term “quality” has become excessively stretched and subjective. As such, determining its definition is challenging, given that academics and practitioners have attributed various meanings to this term, making its interpretation ambiguous (Rust et al. 2018).

Since quality control of clothing manufacturing is crucial and is typically done physically, this often leads to biased inspection findings and low efficiency. Since these investigation quality criteria are responsive to the product quality, companies are unable to stop the recurrence of the same quality issues. For this reason, special programs are required to assist human inspection with knowledge, such as identifying correlations between product flaws for quality forecasting. Numerous studies have reported that association rules promise the creation of efficient quality improvement strategies in the garment sector.

Moreover, many authors accept the qualification of product quality. Some researchers state that product quality is defined primarily based on both external and internal quality of the product. Some researchers describe dimensions of product quality, as the sum of product characteristics. As a measurement of product quality, the researcher used the number of garment defects in this empirical study. In Sri Lankan garment companies, their manufacturing cost including labor are higher than in other South Asian countries like India and Bangladesh. Still, Sri Lankan garment firms have earned their competitive edge by maintaining quality standards at an international level. Therefore, the textile quality used to produce garments is critical for Sri Lanka’s garment industry to be an international leader in this competitive sector (Lekamge and Ekanayake 2021).

Hence, this research study aims to assess the contribution of DAEs in the garment industry, in which product quality is recognized as a pivotal factor in both local and global garment markets, significantly impacting the industry’s success. By focusing on Sri Lanka as a case study, this research contributes to the existing literature on the quality factor within the local garment sector. Through a combined quantitative and qualitative analysis, this study seeks to explore the phenomenon of product quality within a selected garment manufacturing company in Sri Lanka.

## 2.5 Job satisfaction

The level of gratification experienced by employees during the time that they perform their job role and attain their goals and objectives can be defined as job satisfaction (Joshi

Pant and Venkateswaran 2019). Furthermore, job satisfaction is considered a vital factor in determining each employee's job performance in any organization.

Employee attitudes and expectations largely depend on how happy they are with their jobs and how committed they have been to the assigned roles/jobs. Many employee job satisfaction practices have been formalized by most organizations. It affects various dimensions of human resource practices like employee motivation, commitment, performance, and decision-making. Workforce diversity of Sri Lanka specifies that those between the age of 18–60 years are eligible to be hired for job roles. However, disabilities should not be an issue or obstacle to performing their role. Remarkably, DAEs can be recruited in specific job positions, for instance in the garment sector. Especially in divisions such as cutting, sewing, packing divisions, etc., would have jobs with higher compatibility for DAEs.

Additionally, certain garment companies, with a specific focus on DAEs, have implemented various human resource practices aimed at enhancing job satisfaction among their workforces. It is imperative to cultivate a conducive environment for DAEs to mitigate dissatisfaction with their lives and demonstrate their inherent value. Many DAPs harbor misconceptions about their self-worth, leading to disappointment and a negative outlook on life. Consequently, this type of perception hampers their productivity in fulfilling their job roles, contributing to the tendency of being overlooked or misjudged by employers. Furthermore, underestimating the capabilities and skills of DAEs is a common misconception among their colleagues, affecting their social life at the workplace. On the contrary, some researchers argue that employees with strong emotional intelligence tend to maintain higher levels of job satisfaction (Goswami et al. 2018). It will directly impact the productivity level as well as the contribution made by DAEs to the garment industry.

Meantime, many factors can influence the job satisfaction of DAEs to gain more contribution. As employees who have physical difficulties, DAEs are in a constant struggle for their job security due to insecurity of employment (Akkerman et al. 2017). Afterwards, they would expand their capacity and tend to further improve the productivity level accomplished by themselves. Employers must launch specific frameworks to maintain the job satisfaction of DAEs. Providing incentives and bonuses, salary increments, transportation facilities, consistent support, and special offers that enhances DAEs' job satisfaction level. As such, this demonstrates that DAEs' job satisfaction impacts the contribution they make to the garment industry.

## 2.6 Quality of work life

Quality of work-life is one of the factors that directly influences the employee as well as the organization and these two are often positively correlated (Leitão 2019). It includes working conditions, safety, working environment, equal opportunities, and development of human capabilities. The quality of work life can also be determined by the ability of employees to satisfy their requirements through the experiences and knowledge they have gained by working in a particular organization. The quality of work-life acts as a crucial factor that also strongly impacts employee retention. It facilitates health and safety, facilities provided by the organization, work-life balance, and healthy living accommodations (Gunawan and Amalia 2015).

In the garment industry, employees expect a better work-life balance to ease their work pressure since job-related stress is generally high considering the evolving industry demands. To achieve this, organizations must comprehend the employee needs that influence their mental health. It is crucial to empower employees and provide workplace

facilities that enable a balance between their personal and professional lives. In other words, employers can enhance work-life balance by organizing targeted programs and training sessions focused on improving employees' physical and psychological well-being. Activities like medical camps and relaxing games can significantly impact employee morale, fostering increased productivity, commitment, and job satisfaction (Ramawickrama et al. 2017).

The above-explained work-life balance is increasingly special in the case of DAEs in the garment industry due to their physical and mental impairments. Organizations must provide them with special attention to balance their quality of work life. Job satisfaction itself is insufficient to measure their work-life balance. It is essential to have a well-organized plan for DAE retention within the organization. These specifically required a convenient working environment to fulfill their job role without any objections. Safety is another key aspect for the DAEs, due to dissimilar capability/mental and health conditions, apart from their multiple difficulties.

## 2.7 Social recognition

The German philosopher, Honneth's recognition theory shows how inequality and extrusion affect the development of one's positive self-identity. Recognition comes in three ways: recognition of one's needs in a relationship (love and friendship), recognition of legal rights as a citizen, and recognition of one's contribution to the community. Scholarly findings of Honneth further show that violation of any of these recognition types can cause suffering and shame to a person. Recognition leads to an increase in an individual's self-confidence. Furthermore, Fenger (2014) shows a sense of belonging and having a valued social role are important to facilitate positive employment experiences. According to Bjarnason (2009), much weight is placed on social recognition in examining organizational support for employees. Further, he emphasizes that social recognition contributes to self-worth and employee identity and therefore, is important for skill utilization.

Social recognition has been a challenge for DAP in most situations, as society shows a lack of compassion towards them. For example, applying for jobs, going through the screening process, and securing employment have been the biggest challenges for them. Accordingly, the low employment rate and public policies suggest the need for more effective strategies to hire and retain DAPs. Critics have shown how the existing policies do not adequately focus on enhancing the work lives of DAPs.

Due to this discrimination and social isolation, DAPs do not discuss their impairments with their colleagues, which further impedes obtaining minimal support from co-workers. For that, the senior management, the organizational culture, and the HR departments of all organizations should collaborate/work towards formulating a strategy for workforce optimization of DAPs. This includes inspiring DAEs to make the best possible contribution, helping them adapt, and allowing for equity and equality in the workplace. Organizations are responsible for implementing the necessary steps to create sound policies and strategies in this regard and avoid discrimination.

## 2.8 Contribution

Individuals with disabilities encounter numerous challenges in the labor market, experiencing lower educational attainment, higher unemployment rates, and generally lower incomes due to limited job opportunities. Consequently, many individuals, including management, workers, and society at large, tend to overlook DAEs, assuming and underestimating their

capacity to contribute to the industry on par with others who do not face physical or mental difficulties. However, when adequately supported, DAIs demonstrate their full working capacity and contribute to the industry with their best efforts despite some having either permanent or temporary partial setbacks in work capacity.

With appropriate support, individuals with disabilities can effectively contribute to the workforce and make significant contributions to industries. However, certain individuals may experience temporary or permanent limitations in their job capacities. It is imperative to provide sufficient employment encouragement to DAEs, thereby fostering their integration into or maintenance within the labor force.

The primary motivational driver for every laborer or employee is the salary/wages (Weerathna et al. 2023). Globally, pay equity matters, which is a fair expectation and right for all employees. DAP also expects payment in return for their hard work; this payment is a significant source of income for families with a disabled family member, to continue working to enhance contribution with job satisfaction despite a disability; it also paves the way for social integration and involvement rather than that of a financial nature (Marti et al. 2012).

Employee satisfaction is a crucial aspect of human resources management and suggests high job satisfaction in people with disabilities (Kocman and Weber 2018), which generally leads to higher contributions higher ROI in training and development, and lower employee turnover. Seemingly, DAEs have lower absenteeism rates than those of other employees; they are more loyal and can work harder which can result in higher productivity rates (Hernandez et al. 2008).

### 3 Methodology

#### 3.1 Research approach

The researchers applied mixed research methods to derive the pragmatic picture of the research objectives since it deals with both qualitative and quantitative data to achieve the knowledge gap and objectives.

#### 3.2 Ethical clearance

SLIIT Business School and SLIIT Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research & International) office examined and provided the ethical clearance (PVC/RI/EC/2023/12) for this study.

#### 3.3 Sample selection

Researchers selected 20 DAEs in Western and Southern Provinces as the population of the qualitative phase of this study while convenience sampling was utilized as the sampling technique. Two hundred seventy (270) in Western and Southern Provinces were selected as the study sample of the second phase of the study and 159 DAEs were selected as the sample of the study by deploying simple random sampling as the sampling technique. Researchers adopted the Morgan table to determine the sample size of 159 respondents as indicated above (Krejcie and Morgan 1970).

### 3.4 Research instrument and data collection

The data was collected in two phases. In the first phase, to achieve the initial and qualitative objective of this research study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 DAEs. To ensure face validity and content validity, the research instrument underwent a validation process, following the guidelines outlined by Bolarinwa (2015). A panel comprising three researchers with significant research experience carefully reviewed the instrument. The final version of the research instrument was refined based on the incorporation of valuable suggestions and feedback received from this expert panel.

Researchers selected four garment plants located in Western and Southern provinces in Sri Lanka and accordingly selected 20 DAEs for the test sample. The selection of four garment plants was based on several justifications. Firstly, these garment plants were chosen due to their significant contribution to the garment sector in Sri Lanka. They are recognized as key players within the industry, accounting for a substantial portion of the country's garment exports and economic activity. Therefore, studying these companies provides insights into practices and trends that have a significant impact on the sector as a whole.

Secondly, these selected garment plants employ a large number of employees, including a notable proportion of DAEs. By focusing on these companies, researchers can gain a comprehensive understanding of the employment landscape for DAEs within the garment industry. This allows for a more robust analysis of the challenges and opportunities faced by DAEs in accessing and participating in the labor market. The selection of these garment plants and DAEs as the test sample aligns with the research objective of understanding the involvement of DAEs in contributing to organizational profits within the garment industry, while also ensuring the study's relevance and generalizability.

Even though the selected sample was 20, the researchers achieved data saturation after conducting 14 interviews and the respondent profiles are depicted in Table 1.

Upon completion of data collection, the researchers transcribed the gathered information and proceeded to conduct a thematic analysis, focusing on interview data. Through

**Table 1** DAE characteristics of the sample. *Source* Authors' Compilation (2023)

| Respondent number | Gender | Job role    | District | Experience (Years) | Disability type    |
|-------------------|--------|-------------|----------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 01                | Female | Packing     | Galle    | 6                  | Verbal impairment  |
| 02                | Female | Quality     | Colombo  | 3                  | Verbal impairment  |
| 03                | Female | Ironing     | Colombo  | 4                  | Hearing impairment |
| 04                | Male   | Ironing     | Galle    | 1                  | Verbal impairment  |
| 05                | Female | Washing     | Galle    | 11                 | Verbal impairment  |
| 06                | Female | Cutting     | Colombo  | 2                  | Hearing impairment |
| 07                | Male   | HR          | Colombo  | 1                  | Vision impairment  |
| 08                | Male   | Ironing     | Colombo  | 1                  | Hearing impairment |
| 09                | Female | Inspections | Colombo  | 3                  | Hearing impairment |
| 10                | Male   | Planning    | Galle    | 2                  | Vision impairment  |
| 11                | Female | Cutting     | Colombo  | 2                  | Verbal impairment  |
| 12                | Female | Quality     | Galle    | 4                  | Hearing impairment |
| 13                | Male   | Packing     | Galle    | 5                  | Verbal impairment  |
| 14                | Male   | Packing     | Colombo  | 4                  | Hearing impairment |

this analysis, five core themes representing the factors influencing the contribution of DAEs were identified. These themes consist with productivity, product quality, job satisfaction, quality of work life, and social recognition. Based on the thematic analysis results, the researchers have illustrated an empirical conceptual framework (Fig. 1) that comprises five major independent variables: productivity, product quality, job satisfaction, quality of work-life and social recognition, while the dependent variable was taken as the contribution of DAEs towards the Sri Lankan garment industry.

To validate the developed framework, the researchers proceeded with the second phase of data collection. Questionnaires were distributed to gather data, specifically addressing the second objective, which aims to examine the impact of crucial factors on the current role of DAEs in the Sri Lankan garment industry. The questionnaire consisted of 46,

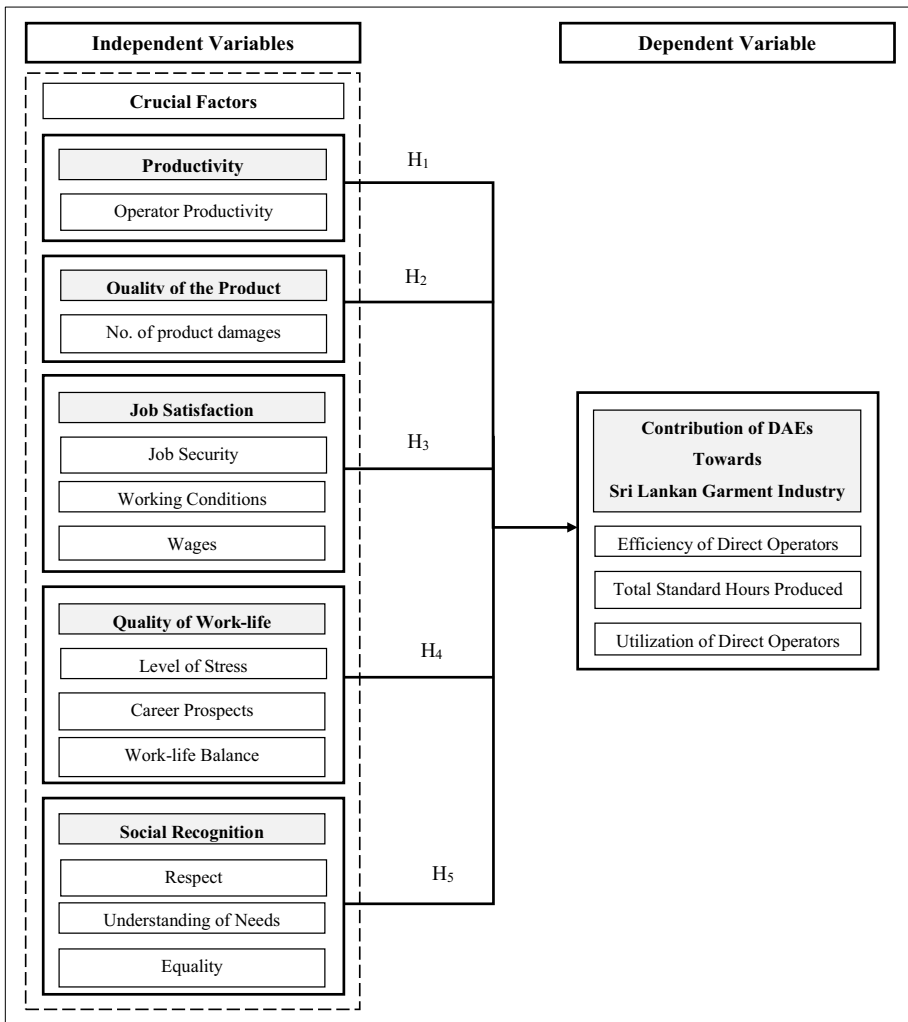


Fig. 1 Conceptual framework. Source: Authors' Compilation (2023)

five-point Likert scale questions, categorized into six major factors, including five independent variables and one dependent variable, with fourteen dimensions in total.

The questionnaires were distributed to a quantitative study sample comprising 159 DAEs employed across four plants situated in the Western and Southern provinces of Sri Lanka. Following the collection of questionnaire responses, the researchers conducted a quantitative analysis using multiple linear regression analysis to test the hypotheses formulated in the current research study. The testing of hypotheses was required for either rejecting the null hypothesis or accepting the five hypotheses established, to achieve the research objective. The analysis was carried out using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 26.0 as the primary tool.

## 4 Results and discussion

### 4.1 Results

This research study was conducted to identify and examine the crucial factors that impact or influence the contribution made by DAEs who are employed in the Sri Lankan garment industry. Further to that, to develop a framework that supports both the DAE and the garment industry to create a win–win environment.

The first objective of the study was to identify the crucial factors that influence the contributions made by DAEs to the garment industry. Researchers employed varied questioning techniques to acquire accurate responses, specifically inquiring about participants' expectations for optimizing their contributions to the respective organization.

Once the data was collected, a thorough thematic analysis of respondent transcripts was conducted to identify the crucial factors that influence the contributions made by DAEs to the garment industry. The analysis followed a systematic approach, ensuring high-level reasoning and rigor in the development of sub-codes and themes. All transcripts were transcribed verbatim to ensure the authenticity of the respondents' narratives.

The process began with open coding, where each transcript was carefully read, and initial codes were assigned to significant statements and phrases that reflected key aspects of the respondents' experiences. Through an iterative process of coding and constant comparison, sub-codes were developed by grouping similar initial codes and refining them into more specific sub-codes that captured the dimensions of the respondents' experiences. Memoing was applied to ensure that the sub-codes accurately represented the underlying patterns in the data.

The sub-codes were then synthesized into broader themes that encapsulated the overarching concepts conveyed by the respondents. This step involved theoretical sensitivity to ensure that the themes were grounded in the data and provided a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing the respondents' work experiences. The analysis yielded five primary themes, each supported by specific codes, sub-codes, and illustrative quotes from the respondents, and the excerpt of this is attached in Appendix 02.

According to their expectations, they expect equality for both normal and DAEs to provide a maximum contribution towards the organization. As an example, respondent 02 stated,

“In this company, both differently abled people and normal people work together. But sometimes there is special treatment for other employees. Not that much different but there are some small treatments. So, I need equal treatment for all of us. It means not bias. All of us are differently abled so bias is unacceptable. I want to work as a family to increase the company’s development.”

According to the above example, it is essential to be equal to every type of employee. Equality provides better recognition to employees, and it provides recognition for employees, especially the DAEs, who tend to be motivated and expand their capacity. Similarly, treating a DAE can maximize the contribution. The purpose of interviewing differently abled employees was to determine such influencing factors that can maximize their contribution to the garment industry.

“It was difficult for me to find a job with my disability. Since I have a job now, I expect job security from the company so that I know I have a way to live and hope to develop my career life. Further, since we are working in the manufacturing plant there is a possibility that we will encounter any physical injuries. I hope the company ensures a safe work environment” – Respondent 6.

As of the above response, it is depicted that finding job opportunities is challenging for the DAEs. Despite all the challenges and hardships, they are grateful for having a secure job. They expect job security from the company as they also need to build a career life and provide some kind of contribution to society. Further, they expect a safe work environment in which protection in all forms is ensured by the company. Accordingly, with job security ensured the DAEs would be more satisfied, and better contributions would be provided.

“Actually, we did not expect anything but in the current situation too much workload for me since I’m in the packing area. It is beyond my capacity; it means it is a bit harder to achieve expected performance and I cannot contribute well because of that. But I like to work on that, and the problem is the workload. So, If I get a workload which matches my capacity, I can contribute well to the organization”.

As individuals, we aspire to a peaceful and content work life. However, achieving this can be challenging when faced with work stress and a substantial workload. The DAP also expects a manageable workload that they enjoy and have a stress-free mind. From the above response, it is clear that the expected performance cannot be achieved due to the high workload which is beyond their capacity. So an appropriate amount of work should be assigned to minimize the level the stress. As a result, a better contribution can be expected from the DAEs.

Researchers generated codes and themes by applying thematic analysis to the collected qualitative data from semi-structured interviews. They have identified productivity, quality of the product, job satisfaction, quality of work-life, and social recognition as themes after generating fourteen codes. Table 2 shows the codes and themes generated from the responses provided by the DAEs.

The majority of employees indicated that job satisfaction is the most important factor that they expected from the organization. Quality of work-life and social recognition are also considered as the same level of requirements. Productivity and quality of the product factors were also pointed out by DAEs. Appendix 01 shows the brief of the responses given by the DAEs.

**Table 2** Codes and themes generated from thematic analysis. *Source* Authors' Compilation based on Thematic Analysis (2023)

| Codes                                                | Themes               |
|------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Job security, Wages, Work conditions                 | Job satisfaction     |
| Respect, Understanding of needs, equality            | Social recognition   |
| Level of stress, Career prospects, Work-life balance | Quality of work life |
| Number of product damages                            | Product quality      |
| Operator efficiency                                  | Productivity         |

The study's second objective aimed to assess the influence of critical factors on the present role of DAEs in the Sri Lankan garment industry. Drawing insights from both thematic analysis results and relevant literature, the researchers developed a questionnaire.

A pilot survey was conducted to assess the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. A sample of 40 DAEs was purposefully selected from the target population, and the questionnaire was administered. Cronbach's alpha values for the questionnaire items exceeded 0.7, indicating satisfactory internal consistency reliability. Additionally, the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy surpassed 0.5, supporting the suitability of the data for factor analysis. Bartlett's test of sphericity was also significant ( $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that correlations between items were sufficient for conducting further analyses. These measures collectively ensured the robustness of the findings regarding the impacts of the identified factors.

Following the confirmation of the validity and reliability of the instrument, the questionnaire was distributed among 159 respondents. The collected data was then utilized in the study for subsequent analysis. The researchers employed multiple regression analysis to assess the hypotheses, listed below. Hypothesis development was supported by the literature and the qualitative assessment done in objective 1.

**H1** There is a significant impact of differently abled employees' productivity level on the contribution made to the garment industry.

**H2** There is a significant impact of differently abled employees' product quality on the contribution made to the garment industry.

**H3** There is a significant impact of differently abled employees' job satisfaction on the contribution made to the garment industry.

**H4** There is a significant impact of differently abled employees' quality of work life on the contribution made to the garment industry.

**H5** There is a significant impact of differently abled employees' social recognition on the contribution made to the garment industry.

In testing the hypotheses of the study, the researchers formulated a multiple regression model to approximate the impact of different variables on the contribution of differently abled individuals. The factors considered in the model were Productivity, Quality of

product, Job satisfaction, Quality of work life, and the social recognition. The resulting equation for the analysis is expressed in Eq. 1.

Equation 1 Multiple Linear Regression

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \beta_5 X_5 + \epsilon_i \quad (1)$$

where Y: Contribution of DAP,  $X_1$ : Productivity,  $X_2$ : Quality of product,  $X_3$ : Job Satisfaction,  $X_4$ : Quality of work life,  $X_5$ : Social Recognition, B: Unstandardized coefficient,  $\epsilon$ : Error value.

The researchers utilized coefficient outputs, model summary, and ANOVA to ascertain the presence of a significant impact among the variables. The model summary provides an overview of the regression model's adequacy for the study, while the ANOVA table presented assesses the overall significance of the regression model, considering the impact of Productivity, Quality of Product, Job Satisfaction, Quality of Work Life, and Social Recognition on the dependent variable (Table 3).

As per Table 3, ANOVA analysis reveals significant F values for productivity ( $F=421.348$ ,  $p=0.001$ ), quality of the product ( $F=308.096$ ,  $p=0.001$ ), job satisfaction ( $F=218.270$ ,  $p=0.001$ ), quality of work life ( $F=210.233$ ,  $p=0.001$ ), and social recognition ( $F=182.966$ ,  $p=0.001$ ). With F values exceeding 100 and all significance levels below 0.05, the regression model is deemed significant, indicating the effectiveness of the models tested. Analyzing the coefficients, productivity exhibits high significance, suggesting that a 1-unit increase in productivity corresponds to a 19.3% rise in DAEs contribution to the garment industry. The quality of the product also shows high significance, with a 9.3% increase in contribution for every unit improvement. Job satisfaction is moderately significant, indicating a 32% rise in contribution with increased job satisfaction. Quality of work life is significant, with a 33.8% increase in the contribution observed with improvement. Social recognition is highly significant, with a 22.2% rise in contribution for each unit increase. These findings lead to the rejection of null hypotheses, while alternative hypotheses  $H_{11}$ ,  $H_{21}$ ,  $H_{31}$ ,  $H_{41}$ , and  $H_{51}$  are accepted.

In summary, the study tested five hypotheses to assess the impact of various factors on the contribution of DAEs to the Sri Lankan garment industry. All hypotheses yielded significant results with  $p$ -values less than 0.01, leading to the acceptance of the respective alternative hypotheses. Specifically, employee productivity, quality of the product, job satisfaction, quality of work life, and social recognition were found to have high or moderate significant impacts on the contribution made by DAEs in the industry.

Objective 03 was to develop a framework that supports DAEs and the garment industry to create a win-win environment.

According to the interpretation of the second objective which is to examine the impact of the crucial factors to the current play of DAEs in the Sri Lankan garment industry, it showed that productivity, quality of work life, and social recognition have a highly significant impact on the contribution of DAEs in garment industries. As per the coefficient table, the significance level is 0.001 for all three factors mentioned above. Also, the Quality of products and Job satisfaction has a moderately significant impact on the contribution of DAEs in garment industries as per the interpretation of the second objective, the coefficient table showed significant levels of quality of product and Job satisfaction as 0.037 and 0.014 respectively. Since the quality of product and Job satisfaction are moderately significant the researcher suggests some supporting factors including, fair work hours, better training & development, insurance coverage, career guidance, mental reassurance, and company incentives. Hence, providing these factors to DAEs can elevate both the quality of the

**Table 3** Multiple linear regression analysis results

| Multiple regression analysis |                | Productivity | Quality of product | Job satisfaction | Quality of work life | Social recognition |
|------------------------------|----------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| ANOVA                        | Mean square    | 53.231       | 29.152             | 19.693           | 15.439               | 12.519             |
|                              | F              | 421.348      | 308.096            | 218.27           | 210.233              | 182.965            |
|                              | Sig            | 0.001        | 0.001              | 0.001            | 0.001                | 0.001              |
| Coefficients                 | Unstandardized | B            | 0.093              | 0.320            | 0.338                | 0.222              |
|                              | Coefficients   | Std. Error   | 0.044              | 0.070            | 0.073                | 0.063              |
|                              | Sig            |              | 0.037              | 0.014            | 0.001                | 0.001              |

*Source* Authors' Compilation Based on SPSS Multiple Regression Analysis Output (2023)

product and job satisfaction, consequently leading to a heightened and significant impact on their overall contribution.

As mentioned, providing fair working hours and better training and development can improve the quality of the product. By offering company incentives, improving mental reassurance, providing career guidance, and understanding them and treating them equally researchers were trying to increase the impact of job satisfaction. Those strategies will support the garment industry to increase the contribution of DAEs in the Sri Lankan garment industry. Improvement of the contribution made by DAEs' will drive to create a win-win environment for both the garment industry and DAEs. When contribution increases, the garment industry tends to provide more job opportunities to DAEs. By providing job opportunities, both the garment industry and DAEs can obtain lots of advantages.

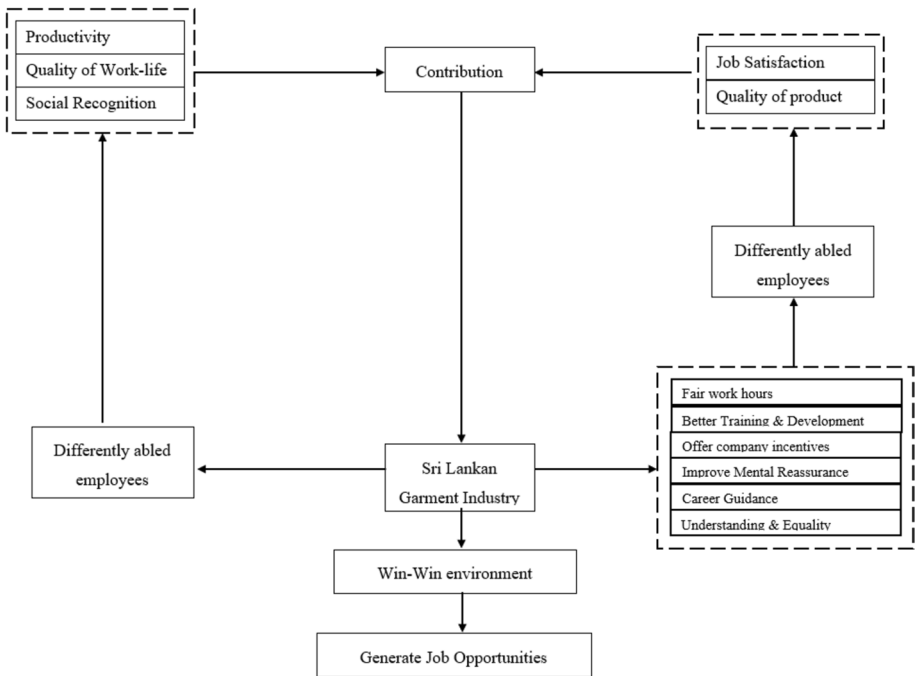
As mentioned in the literature review, 8.6% of DAP are not included in the labor force due to their disabilities. It will impact the economically inactive population in the labor force. Providing job opportunities for DAP will be a great process to improve the labor force and improve the lifestyle of People with Disabilities (PWD). When an employer provides career opportunities for DAP it positively impacts their lifestyle. They also can survive as typically as a regular person, and they can live a life full of happiness. Not only economically, but also personal growth can be uplifted by gaining a competitive advantage from their contribution. And it will be a notable example for the other industries. So, they can also implement such strategies to improve the participation of DAP in their companies.

Researchers have implemented a framework to maximize the contribution of DAEs and create a win-win environment for both DAEs and the garment industry by including appropriate strategies for less impacted factors such as the quality of the product and job satisfaction. So, this framework will be supported by the garment industry and DAEs to optimize their contribution as well as maximize organizational profits by providing more opportunities.

The primary objective of this study was to introduce a framework for the Sri Lankan garment industry to create opportunities for DAEs to maximize their contributions. By achieving the first and second objectives, the study identified significant factors that moderately influence the contributions of DAEs. Firstly, the researchers identified the crucial factors influencing the contributions of DAEs to the Sri Lankan garment industry. They then examined the impact of these factors using multiple regression analysis. The results of this analysis guided the development of a framework that benefits both the garment industry and DAEs, fostering a win-win environment. This study's findings revealed that organizations could enhance job opportunities for DAEs and maximize their contributions by implementing the framework presented in Fig. 2

The proposed framework designed for the Sri Lankan garment industry focuses on enhancing the integration and contribution of differently-abled employees (DAEs). This framework is structured around crucial factors such as productivity, quality of work-life, and social recognition, which are essential for amplifying job satisfaction and the quality of products. These elements are pivotal in enabling DAEs to make significant contributions to the industry.

DAEs are recognized as central contributors within this study, which specifically focuses on their roles and potential within the Sri Lankan garment industry, with the model illustrating a dynamic interplay between inputs and outputs that enhance their work experiences and contributions. Inputs such as fair work hours, effective training and development, motivational company incentives, mental reassurance, career guidance, and an environment fostering understanding and equality are crucial. These inputs aim to improve the



**Fig. 2** Framework. Source: Authors' Compilation based on Thematic Analysis (2023)

productivity, quality of work-life, and social recognition of DAEs, thereby enhancing their overall contribution to the garment industry.

The garment industry in Sri Lanka benefits from creating a supportive environment that not only fosters job opportunities for DAEs but also creates a win-win situation by enhancing the industry's output and social responsibility. This cyclical model leads to job creation and increased contributions to national employment, which in turn uplifts the lives of these marginalized individuals.

Supporting literature further validates the elements of this framework. For instance, research by Hindle et al. (2014) highlights that DAEs can be highly productive when appropriately supported, which underscores the productivity aspect of the framework. Benavides and Landeghem (2015) discuss how quality manufacturing is measured by being free from defects and consistency with standards, supporting the focus on product quality. Goswami et al. (2018) suggests that human resource practices significantly impact job satisfaction, emphasizing the need for improved working conditions, fair wages, and job security. Additionally, the quality of work-life can be enhanced by managing stress levels, offering career prospects, and ensuring work-life balance, while social recognition can be fostered through respect, understanding, and equality in the workplace.

This framework provides a comprehensive approach to leveraging the potential of DAEs, aligning empirical research findings with practical interventions in the Sri Lankan garment industry. By focusing on training, incentives, and equality, the industry not only enhances its economic efficiency but also fulfills its social responsibility, creating a sustainable and inclusive work environment. This detailed analysis will be instrumental in providing both a theoretical and practical perspective on enhancing the contribution of differently-abled employees in this key industry sector.

Moreover, this framework serves as a guide for government institutions and industry associations, such as the National Council and National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities, and the Free Trade Zone Manufacturers Association. It outlines strategies for revising employment policies to better integrate differently-abled individuals into the workforce, thereby enabling them to build fulfilling careers. By embracing diversity and fostering an inclusive work environment, organizations can enhance their reputation and be recognized for creating significant employment opportunities. This not only contributes to higher employment rates but could also positively impact the country's GDP. Additionally, this framework provides a foundational resource for further research in disability studies, addressing previously unexplored aspects of employment for differently-abled people. It aims to broaden the knowledge base and understanding of these crucial issues among future researchers.

## 4.2 Discussion

Through the present study, a few factors that mainly impact the contribution made by the DAEs were identified such as productivity, quality of the product, job satisfaction, quality of work life and social recognition.

Hindle et al. (2014) research showed that the DAEs are productive in their performance, and the present study identified it as a factor that has a moderately significant impact on the contribution. Benavides and Landeghem (2015) show the quality of manufacturing is measured through being free from defects and less variation from the standards. In the present study, the researchers identified the number of product damages as a dimension of the quality of the product and it has an impact on the contribution. Accordingly, the analysis showed there is a highly significant impact on the contribution.

Job satisfaction of an employee is a critical factor that differs from one individual to another. According to Goswami (2018), human resource practices have an impact on job satisfaction. In the present study, the researchers identified that the job security, working conditions of the organizations, and wages paid would impact the job satisfaction of the DAEs'. The analysis showed there is a moderately significant impact on the contribution.

Quality of work life can be considered as the factors that influence mostly the employee's performance and the organization equally. It can be built by rewarding, fulfilling the needs and requirements, and avoidance of stress at the workplace. In the present study, it was identified that the level of stress, career prospects, and work-life balance would improve the quality of work life of the DAEs. According to the German philosopher's recognition theory, recognition comes in three ways such as one's needs in a relationship, recognition of human rights, and recognition of one's contribution to the community. In the present study, it was identified that the respect earned from the supervisors and coworkers, understanding of the needs of the senior management, and equality among the workers have an impact on social recognition.

The findings of the results further affirm that productivity, social recognition, and the quality of work life have a highly significant impact while job satisfaction and quality of the product have a moderately significant impact.

## 5 Policy implications

Identifying the crucial factors which impact the contribution made by DAEs to the garment industry of Sri Lanka is important to improve the well-being of the employees by providing employment opportunities and profit maximizing of the organizations.

Accordingly, the findings of the study have significant implications for the DAEs and to the garment industry of Sri Lanka. The researchers identified three factors that mainly impact the DAEs' to the garment industry of Sri Lanka, namely productivity, quality of work life, and social recognition. Understandably, the mental factors affect mostly the DAEs to provide a better contribution. It is identified that if the organizations provide a better work environment with training and development, company incentives, mental reassurance, career guidance, and high job security are likely to improve productivity, quality of the product, job satisfaction, quality of work life, and the social recognition of the DAEs. As a result, it will increase the contribution made by the DAEs to the garment industry of Sri Lanka. These findings enlighten the organizations to design jobs and provide more employment opportunities to the DAEs, which will in turn be beneficial to the organizations as well as the economy. The findings of the research study are probably an eye opening for all industries in employing the DAEs by giving them the opportunities to develop their careers, improve their personal development, and prove their self-worth.

## 6 Limitations of the study

The present research is not exempted from anticipated limitations. While the primary objective is to propose a framework for the Sri Lankan garment industry to enhance opportunities for DAEs and maximize their contributions, certain constraints were encountered. The study's focus on employment selection criteria was confined to the garment industries in the Western and Southern provinces of Sri Lanka. Furthermore, within the Sri Lankan context, limited existing literature addresses HR practices beyond garment industries and fails to delve into crucial factors affecting differently abled individuals' workplace contributions. Globally, the absence of research papers or articles exploring DAE contributions specifically in garment industries, is notable. During questionnaire data collection, challenges arose, including the inability of some DAEs to respond verbally or comprehend written text. Sign language assistance was required, and due to the communication constraints of the respondents, brief interview durations of two or three minutes were allocated.

## Appendix 1

Question 03: What do you expect from the company to increase your contribution?

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Respondent 01 "Actually, we did not expect anything but in current situation too much workload to me since I'm in packing area. It is beyond my capacity; it means it is bit harder to achieve expected performance and I cannot contribute well because of that. But I like to work on that, and the problem is workload. So, If I get a workload which is match with my capacity, I can contribute well to the organization"

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- Respondent 02 "Actually, it is enough to give us an opportunity to work in here. I'm not blaming them. They are very good staff that I ever met. But the salary is bit low. I have 4 members in my family. So, I need to treat them. But this salary is bit less, so I expect some increments from the company. Due to current economic crises inflation rate is high so we need some increments. If we get some increment, then we have some motivational factor and we can contribute well"
- Respondent 03 "The current process of this company is bit confused, but we can deal with that process without any problem, but I think If the current process is much smoother then I think efficiency level and effective level will increase then we can contribute more. As a result, it will lead to the success of this company. We work hard for this company since this is our home. Because of this we can survive with the respect in this society. Before joining this company I'm nothing but after joined I'm became an employee."
- Respondent 04 "Actually, due to this current situation in this country our expenses are increasing so I expect some subsidies from the company. I think it will be a great help for my family and my life also and because I'm telling that this company is my everything. I'm helpless person. The only option I have is this company. I can tell my problem only to this company not to any other person"
- Respondent 05 "In this company both differently abled people and normal people are work together. But sometimes there is a special treat for other employees. Not that much different but there are some small treatments. So, I need equal treatment for all of us. It means not bias. All of us are differently abled so bias is unacceptable. I want work as a family to increase the company's development"
- Respondent 06 "I expect freedom from the company. Since the workload is bit high, I felt stress sometimes. I think if I can get more freedom then I can manage my stress level. So, I can contribute well to the success for the company. I can understand the situation in this company, but I have my family problems also So, I need to balance those things. Sometimes due to the work load I feel stress that is why I told I need bit freedom then I can concentrate more on my work"
- Respondent 07 "We receive so many benefits from the company especially the understanding of our incapability and supporting us in many ways. Moreover, If I'm getting some bonuses for the new year and Christmas then it is being motivational factor for me. Then I can contribute well to the company"
- Respondent 08 "It was difficult to work with a team without talking with them. It was a big challenge because when I required any kind of a support, it is difficult to be connected with others due to my disability. So, I expect a specific procedure to increase my work efficiency by practicing easy way to connect others"
- Respondent 09 "I am very happy to work in this company. Because this my second home. Current situation of global crisis I expect that the company offer bonuses and annual increments. Since I am a deaf person, gather all deaf employees to a one section appoint a deaf person as our line supervisor. Then he or she can understand our feelings and problems. It was very easy and flexible to work for us"
- Respondent 10 "As a vision impaired person, I have some vision impairments, but I am not a fully blind person. Since I am working in planning department, I always working with laptop. I request from my company to increase my insurance claim amount. Because like once a year I must change my spectacles. So, I must expense lots of money for that. There are lot of well-educated vision impaired people in the outside society."
- Respondent 11 "We receive all the basic things we expect from our company. Such as a good pay, equality, and other incentives we receive monthly. But I expect some more facilities that required to do my job role for example more training program so then I can easily proceed my work without any disturbance. Also, I do expect accommodation facilities from the company"
- Respondent 12 "It was difficult for me find a job with my disability. Since I have a job now, I expect job security from the company so that I know I have a way to live and hope to develop my career life. Further since we are working in the manufacturing plant there is a possibility that we encounter any physical injuries. I hope the company ensures a safe work environment"
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Respondent 13 “It was difficult to work with a team without talking with them. It was a big challenge because when I required any kind of a support, it is difficult to be connected with others due to my disability. So, I expect a specific procedure to increase my work efficiency by practicing easy way to connect others”

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Question 04: Did you face any challenges? If yes, what are they?

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Respondent 01 “Yes, actually I have a vision problem, it means not fully blind I cannot work under light, but I can work under low light so, it takes me some time to complete the work I am assigned to, but I put my maximum effort to finish work before the deadline. This company consulted me through a doctor and then decided the work and the environment that I can work”

Respondent 02 “Yes, adopting to the different culture is the one of challenges that I faced. Every day I think how I change according to the new culture that I am work in but actually it is bit difficult because this is my first job, I have no experience in previous. So, when the first day I came to this company I feel different. I don’t know how to tell that. But now it is ok. Now all are friends of mine”

Respondent 03 “The challenge that I faced is I spent more time to learn technologies” from the childhood I had lack of knowledge about the technologies. And my disability also a one reason for that. Because I’m learning up to grade 10 because my family have no money to spend for the higher education to me. So, I stopped learning and start to do a job but since I’m under 18, companies did not recruit me. But after I joined this company, my life became changed. Now I’m learning new things

Respondent 04 “Actually, there is no any challenge I faced. I cannot remember also since there is a friendly staff, and they consult me and provide a job role that is match with my capacity. Therefore, I have not faced any challenges”

Respondent 05 “Actually, time management and work management are the challenges I faced. Since my disability Sometimes it is hard to work as others. Most of the time I cannot manage my time. I think I am doing the work slowly, but no one scold to me. But I understood I am being late when compared to others. I don’t know the actual reason, but I am tiring my best to manage my time. Time waste result to the delay of work. This staff gives lots of support to us. So, I want to do my best to this company”

Respondent 06 “This working environment is bit dangerous because we are working in the plant that manufacturing clothes. due to my hearing problem, work in dangerous environment is a challenge that I faced. It means assume, if something going to fall normal person hear that sound and he can run away but I cannot because of my problem. But there is a supervisor who is take care of us. Without the supervisor we cannot work. So, this is the challenge that I faced”

Respondent 07 “At first when I began my job it was difficult for me to adopt to the corporate culture. Learning the company processes was also a challenge for me. But with the training programs and the support from my supervisors and co-workers I gradually adopted to them”

Respondent 08 “As a disabled employee, less connectivity was the main difficulty that I have faced during my work-life. Within this five year of a period, I faced a lot of difficulties because of my dumbness. It was very inefficient situation that I have faced. As an employee, everyone should have to be interactive within the workplace. Because of that, it was very difficult to complete some tasks at the due time.”

Respondent 09 “Since I am a deaf employee, I have some challengers. HR department giving some valuable announcement for us. But I can’t hear that announcement. Most of the times my friends telling. But sometimes I missed some announcements. Most of the times I am with alone in the factory. Because I have no way to gather and interact with my friends. In launch hour and tea times my friends get together and staying happily. I missed those moments.”

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- Respondent 10 "I have not any big challenges. But I think there is an all matter for vision impaired employees. Since we are working at a sawing plant, light allocation and brightness of the working premises is very high. We need a dark surround to work smoothly. It was very easy for our eyes. If our company can arrange a dark area or some special room with low brightness lights it is very easy for us."
- Respondent 11 "At first when I began my job it was difficult for me to adopt to the corporate culture. Learning the company processes was also a challenge for me. But with the training programs and the support from my supervisors and co-workers I gradually adopted to them."
- Respondent 12 "With my disability it was difficult for me to adopt to the normal work routine. I needed support from my team members and there were lot of miscommunications between me and other non-disabled team members. Also learning the processes was another challenge I faced. However, with time and the support from my supervisors and co-workers I was able to adopt to the company processes."
- Respondent 13 "As a disabled employee, less connectivity was the main difficulty that I have faced during my work-life. Within this five year of a period, I faced a lot of difficulties because of my dumbness. It was very inefficient situation that I have faced. As an employee, everyone should have to be interactive within the workplace. Because of that, it was very difficult to complete some tasks at the due time."
- Respondent 14 "When I started my career, it was difficult for me to adjust myself with the new culture. As a disabled employee, I need a special attention from other employees. It is difficult to adjust to gain caring as a special employee. So, the biggest challenge is understanding the other employees' conversations while working."
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## Appendix 2 Excerpts from the thematic analysis

| Theme            | Codes           | Sub-codes                             | Quotes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Memoing                                                                                |
|------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Job Satisfaction | Job security    | Acceptance, Feeling secure            | Respondent 12:<br>“I expect job security from the company so that I know I have a way to live and hope to develop my career life.”                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Ensuring job security through acceptance and providing a secure environment is crucial |
|                  | Wages           | Adequate pay, Salary increments       | Respondent 02:<br>“The salary is a bit less, so I expect some increments from the company. If we get some increment, then we have some motivational factor and we can contribute well.”<br>Respondent 07:<br>“We receive so many benefits from the company... Moreover, If I'm getting some bonuses for the new year and Christmas then it is being motivational factor for me.” | Fair and adequate compensation motivates employees to contribute effectively           |
|                  | Work conditions | Safe environment, Manageable workload | Respondent 01: “If I get a workload which matches my capacity, I can contribute well to the organization.”<br>Respondent 06: “I think if I can get more freedom then I can manage my stress level. So, I can contribute well to the success of the company.”                                                                                                                     | Providing a manageable workload and safe conditions enhances job satisfaction          |

| Theme              | Codes                            | Sub-codes                      | Quotes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Memoing                                                                               |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Social Recognition | Respect                          | Equality, Recognition          | Respondent 05: "I want work as a family to increase the company's development. Bias is unacceptable."                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Equal treatment and recognition foster a sense of belonging and motivation            |
|                    | Understanding of needs, Equality | Emotional support, Inclusivity | Respondent 07: "We receive so many benefits from the company especially the understanding of our incapability and supporting us in many ways."<br>Respondent 09: "Since I am a deaf person, gather all deaf employees to a one section appoint a deaf person as our line supervisor. Then he or she can understand our feelings and problems." | Understanding and addressing specific needs improves employee morale and productivity |

| Theme                | Codes             | Sub-codes                                          | Quotes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Memoing                                                                                  |
|----------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Quality of Work Life | Level of stress   | Stress management, Work-life balance               | Respondent 06: "I think if I can get more freedom then I can manage my stress level. So, I can contribute well to the success of the company."<br>Respondent 10: "If our company can arrange a dark area or some special room with low brightness lights it is very easy for us."                                                                                                                                                   | Balancing work demands with personal needs reduces stress and enhances work-life quality |
|                      | Career prospects  | Professional growth, Opportunities for advancement | Respondent 04: "I expect some subsidies from the company. I think it will be a great help for my family and my life also and because I'm telling that this company is my everything."<br>Respondent 08: "I expect a specific procedure to increase my work efficiency by practicing easy way to connect others."<br>Respondent 14: "My job helps me to hope for a better future as of the company support given to people like us." | Providing career development opportunities promotes long-term employee satisfaction      |
|                      | Work-life balance | Family support, Flexible arrangements              | Respondent 10: "Since I am working in planning department, I request from my company to increase my insurance claim amount."<br>Respondent 06: "I have my family problems also So, I need to balance those things."                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Supporting work-life balance through policies and benefits enhances overall well-being   |

| Theme           | Codes                     | Sub-codes                        | Quotes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Memoing                                                                                   |
|-----------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Product Quality | Number of product damages | Error reduction, Quality control | Respondent 05:<br>“The best way to contribute to our company is to reduce the number of errors we produce in our garments.”                                                                                                                         | Emphasizing quality control and error reduction improves product standards and efficiency |
| Productivity    | Operator efficiency       | Training, Task management        | Respondent 03:<br>“I think If the current process is much smoother then I think efficiency level and effective level will increase.”<br>Respondent 11:<br>“With more training programs, I can easily proceed with my work without any disturbance.” | Providing adequate training and support enhances productivity and task management         |

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## Declarations

**Conflict of interest** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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