Employment Status of Individuals with Disabilities

by Marie Kraska, Bertram Zinner, and Asheber Abebe, Auburn University

Abstract

A non-experimental design was used to investigate the relationship of the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) scores to employment status. Groups were comprised of individuals with disabilities who were either employed or not employed immediately following their taking of the TABE and being released from a testing and employment services center in southeast Alabama. Data for 71 individuals were analyzed to create a model to predict employment status of individuals with physical disabilities based on gender, race, age, and scores on the TABE. Logit and probit analyses were conducted and the Akaike Information Criterion was used to select the best model. Results revealed a significant interactive effect of gender and spelling and gender on the response, employment. Non-Caucasians were hired more often than Caucasians.

Introduction

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) 1990 mandates that individuals with disabilities shall not be subject to discrimination based on their disabilities. According to the ADA, individuals with disabilities are those who have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities such as walking, seeing, hearing, learning, or working. The intent of the law is to assure that individuals with disabilities have equal access in areas such as employment, housing, transportation, and public accommodations (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990). Title I requires employers with 15 or more employees to provide qualified individuals with disabilities an equal opportunity to benefit from the full range of employment-related opportunities available to others. In addition, Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires employers with federal contracts or subcontracts that exceed $10,000 to take affirmative steps to hire, retain, and promote qualified individuals with disabilities. The regulations implementing Section 503 require that affirmative steps should be taken to refrain from discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities in employment and that services be provided to promote independent living in the community (Huefner, 2000). In 1990, Congress found that more than 43 million Americans have one or more physical or mental disabilities.

On a national level, three out of ten individuals from ages 18 to 64 with disabilities are employed either full or part time compared to eight out of ten adults without disabilities, and people with slight disabilities are eight times more likely to be employed than people with severe disabilities (National Organization on Disability, 2001).

The unemployment rate for people with disabilities living in Alabama is over 70%, and 72% of working age people with disabilities say they would like to work. This is consistent with national figures. Consequently, people with disabilities often live at or below poverty level: 34% live in household incomes with less than $15,000 annual income, compared to 12% of those without disabilities (Alabamians with Disabilities Act, 2003). The Alabama Disabilities Action Coalition reported that there are more than 945,000 people with disabilities who live in Alabama. Approximately one-half of Alabamians 65 years of age and older reported having some type of disability in 2000. These disabilities included blindness, deafness, severe vision or hearing impairment; difficulty performing physical activities, such as walking, difficulty learning, remembering, or concentrating, etc. For the 21 to 64 year old population, 23.2% had some type of disability.

Employer attitudes toward hiring individuals with disabilities tend to vary depending on individual definitions of attitudes, specific types of disabilities, and perceived cause of the disability (Bordieri, Drehmer, and Taricone, 1990). Regardless of the type of disability, individuals who were seen as personally responsible for their disability received lower hiring recommendations than those whose disabilities were attributed to some external factors. Results of a study by Bordieri, Drehmer,

and Taylor (1997) indicated that job candidates with depression or obesity were evaluated more negatively than equally-qualified non-disabled job candidates. Overall, employers view workers with physical disabilities more favorably than those with mental disabilities (Scheid, 1999). Employers tend to respond positively to general statements about hiring individuals with disabilities. Typically employers agree that all individuals should have equal opportunity for employment; however, their behavior is not consistent with this view. They do not respond as positively to actually hiring individuals with disabilities (Hernandez, Keys, Balcazar, 2000). Hotchkiss (2004) collected demographic and employment data for the months of March, April, May, and June from 1981 through 2000. She found that individuals with disabilities tended to be slightly older, have lower education levels, and feel less attachment to the labor market than their counterparts without disabilities. Only 28 percent of 69,906 individuals with disabilities were employed compared to 79% of 972,161 individuals without disabilities. Kennedy and Olney (2001) reported:

> During the five-year period immediately following the passage of the ADA. . . An estimated 748,000 were refused employment, 402,000 were refused a promotion, and 245,000 were denied a transfer, and 227,000 were refused access to training programs due to an ongoing health problem, impairment, or disability. (p. 4)

Discrimination in the job market is a major problem for males with disabilities (Baldwin & Johnson, 2000). From 1990 when ADA was passed until 1995, employment of men with disabilities was 7.2 percentage points lower than before 1990 (DeLeire, 2000). Passage of the ADA could be viewed by employers as legislation that potentially increases the cost of hiring individuals with disabilities because the law requires that employers make reasonable accommodations for these workers (Hotchkiss, 2004).

Some barriers to employment such as limited expectations or fear of failure may be self- imposed (Cheek, 2003). Lack of awareness of assistive technology, funding and access, and expertise on how to use the technology pose other barriers (Butler, Crudden, Sansing, & LeJeune, 2002). Crudden, Williams, McBroom, and Moore (2002) confirmed earlier studies by Ferber and Birnbaum (1981) and Hollingsworth and Pease (1980) that poor employment preparation is another barrier to successful employment for women. Ferber and Birnbaum (1981) suggested that education and training were viable paths to employment only if the education were focused on skills appropriate for a specific job group. More than two decades ago, Hollingsworth and Mastroberti (1983) recommended job or skill training be a part of a comprehensive program to assist women with disabilities to obtain and maintain successful employment.

Literature and research related specifically to employment of individuals with physical disabilities based on their academic skills are scant; however, individuals with disabilities need the same kinds of basic employability skills as those without disabilities (delivering embedded basic skills with disabled people, n.d.). Sherer and Eadie (1987) define employability skills as those skills applicable to all jobs, regardless of the industry or specific job. Davis and Miller (1996) reported that job restructuring and diversity in the workplace require effective communication skills and knowledge of group processes, as well as other basic skills critical to employment success. Sanchez (2003) projected increasing social inequities in the 21st century and a need for individuals to work and communicate effectively as part of a team, a community, and a society. Also, he proposed that employees' knowledge, experiences, and attitudes are important to competitive employment. Results of a survey conducted by DeMario, Rex, and Morreau (1990) revealed that personal-social skills were ranked highest in a list of 32 employability skills for individuals with visual disabilities.

A comprehensive list of desirable entry-level employability skills were identified in a report released in 1991 by the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS). Along with academic skills, the SCANS report included resource management, thinking skills, organizational skills, information management, personal qualities, and interpersonal skills as critical competencies necessary for entry-level employment. Martin and Wright (2007) emphasized the acquisition of basic academic skills as prerequisite to vocational training or employment. Busse (1992) observed that employers want employees who have not only the basic reading, writing, and arithmetic skills, but also effective communication skills and working in groups. Pont and Werquin (2001) reported that basic skills, with emphasis on reading and writing, are prerequisite competencies to successful employment in a global and electronic, knowledge-based economy of the 21st century.

Statement of the Problem

The lack of information related to employment of individuals with physical disabilities based on their academic background provided the genesis for this study. Specifically, this study investigated the reading, mathematical computation, applied mathematics, language, and spelling as important for obtaining employment. Martin, Curtis, and Shipp (2007) observed that assessment of basic academic achievement is an important component of the total assessment process for job readiness and independent living.

Potential Significance of this Study

The Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) is an achievement test ". . . designed to measure achievement of basic skills commonly found in adult basic education curricula and taught in high school and adult instructional programs" (CTB McGraw-Hill, 1996, p.1). If the results indicate that the TABE scores influence whether or not a person is employed, then the potential significance of this project is that those educators, evaluators, and counselors preparing these individuals for employment may be able to enhance individual education programs to better prepare these individuals for employment. On the other hand, if results indicate that TABE scores do not predict employment status, then the significance of this project will inform educators, evaluators, and counselors that there may be other variables such as personality, work ethic, and initiative that are associated with employment status.

A licensed vocational rehabilitation counselor administers the test to an individual or to a group. The complete battery consists of five subscales that measure an individual's achievement in the following areas: (1) reading, (2) mathematics computation, (3) applied mathematics, (4) language, and (5) spelling. Results for the TABE may be reported by grade equivalency, raw score, or scale score. Subscales for the TABE and the respective competencies measured are displayed in Table 1.

Content-related validity (correspondence between test content and instructional content) of the TABE was established by CTB/McGraw-Hill developers by the use of information obtained though a comprehensive curriculum review and meetings with educational experts to identify common educational goals and corresponding knowledge and skills. Patterns of intercorrelations between the TABE and other assessments demonstrated convergent and divergent validity. For example, the Language subtest correlates highly with the Reading subtest as would be expected; while its correlations with the Mathematics subtests are lower (CTB McGraw-Hill, 1996, p.1). Reliability was established using the Kuder-Richardson KR20 formula. Internal consistency indexes were calculated for each of the five levels of the TABE: L (Literacy); E (Easy); M (Medium); D (Difficult); and A (Advanced). The KR20 indexes ranged from .81 to .96 (CTB McGraw-Hill, 1996, p. 34-35). The scale score is the basic score for TABE. Scale scores are units of a single, equal-interval scale that is applied across all levels of the TABE. Scale scores range from

Table 1

Subscales and Skills Measured by the Test of Adult Basic Education

Subscale	Skills measured
Reading	Construction of meaning; embedded vocabulary words; diagrams, charts, map; find and use reference sources
Mathematical Computation	Addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division of whole numbers, decimals, and fractions; integers; algebraic expressions; exponents; percents (Calculators not permitted)
Applied Mathematics	Apply wide range of mathematical skills, methods, and concepts such as budgeting, planning, prediction, and interpreting data (Calculators optional)
Language	Grammar, mechanics, sentence formation, paragraph development
Spelling	Commonly misspelled and commonly used words related to real-life situations

0 to 999 (CTB McGraw-Hill, 1995, p. 2). The equal-interval property of the scale makes scale scores especially appropriate for various statistical purposes because these scores can be added, subtracted, and averaged across test levels. Such computations permit direct comparisons among classes, schools, or entire districts (CTB McGraw-Hill, 1995, p.2).

Setting for the Study

The Achievement Center-Easter Seal is a non-profit community rehabilitation facility owned and operated by a county Chapter of Alabama Easter Seal Society in South-East Alabama. The mission of the Center is to provide employment readiness programs and independent living skills for physically, mentally, and developmentally disabled individuals; The Center provides basic testing (academic and skills), education and job preparation, and job placement services to individuals (consumers) who are referred by their vocational or rehabilitation counselor. Most adults referred to the Center will be administered the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) or some other test(s). TABE scores give an indication of an individual's grade level of functioning in areas such as reading, language, and mathematics. These kinds of basic skills are essential to gainful employment.

This was a retrospective study using two groups. The researcher collected test scores and employment data from the consumers' files which were collected by the Achievement Center from 1999-2003. The purpose of this study was to create a model to predict employment status of individuals with physical disabilities based on individuals' gender, race, age, and scores on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE). Specifically, the purpose was to discriminate between cases who were employed and those who were not employed after exiting the Achievement Center. Expected outcomes were that those individuals with higher scores on the TABE may be employed more often than those with lower scores on the TABE.

Methodology

Sample

The sample for this study was 71 adults with physical disabilities who had received testing and employment services between 1999 and 2003 at the Achievement Center—Easter Seal. There were 34 females and 37 males in the sample; 32 of Caucasian decent and 39 of non-Caucasian decent (35 African American, 1 Asian American, 1 Hispanic, 2 American Indian); 38 individuals were employed and 33 were not employed. Of those who were employed, 21 were females and 17 were males. The county in which the subjects reside is rural and suburban, with a 2005 population slightly more than 123,000. In 2003, the median household income for the county was $33,408. Residents are predominately of Caucasian decent (74%) with 23% being of African American decent, and the remaining residents being of American Indian, Pacific Islander, Hispanic, or Asian decent (U. S. Census Bureau, n.d.). There are two urban areas in the county: the county seat which has a population of approximately 25,000 and an adjacent city of approximately 48,000, which includes the largest university in the state with an enrollment of more than 23,000.

All of the subjects participating in this study had been diagnosed by a bona fide physician as having a physical disability. There was a variety of disabilities among the subjects, ranging from disabilities such as lung disease, heart condition, cerebral palsy, and back pain to hearing loss and visual impairments. The ages of the subjects at the time of testing ranged from 19 to 62 (median = 40 years). All of the subjects had completed the TABE, received job counseling, and had exited the Center to start a job or to seek employment.

Procedures

Individual files of consumers at the Achievement Center were reviewed to identify adults with physical disabilities who had taken the TABE. These individuals were grouped into one group or another (employed/not employed) based on their employment status. The researchers recorded demographic data [gender, race, age, disability, and level of TABE taken (TABE has 4 levels of difficulty)] for these consumers and identified the Form of TABE completed (Form 5 or Form 7). Grade Level for each subject on each subscale of the TABE was recorded. Next, the researchers consulted the Norms Book for Forms 5 and 6 to convert Grade Level to Number Correct (Example: for Level D for vocabulary, the Grade Level is 8.0, refer to Table 25, Page 54 in Norms Book, and the Number Correct is 20 out of 30 possible) (CTB McGraw-Hill, 1990). Also, the Norms Book for Forms 5 and 6 was consulted to convert Number Correct to Scale Score (Example: for Level D for Vocabulary, the Scale Score for 20 correct is 752 as found on Table 5, Page 16). Then, the average of the Scale Scores for Vocabulary and Comprehension to yield one Scale Score for Reading; the average of the Scale Scores for Language Mechanics and Language Expression were calculated to yield one Scale Score for Language —this was done to be in keeping with the subscales

as reported for Form 7. (Example: For Scale Score 752 for Vocabulary and Scale Score 754 for Comprehension, the Reading Scale Score is 753 as verified by Table 13, Page 31 in the Norms Book for Forms 5 and 6). The same procedure as noted in steps 7 and 8 were used for Form 7 using the Norms Book for Forms 7 and 8. Finally, the researchers consulted the Linking Table to link the Scale Scores for Form 5 to the Scale Scores for Form 7. This was necessary because some of the subjects took Form 5 of the TABE and some took Form 7. The level of the TABE is not a factor in this conversion, only the Form is important. (Example: A Scale Score of 753 for Reading on the Form 5 is converted to a Scale Score of 531 on the Form 7—See Page 8 of the Linking Table). The scores on the TABE for these individual consumers were analyzed using logistic regression analysis procedures to identify relationships among the independent variables (age, gender, race, scores on the TABE, and employment status.

Statistical Procedures Used

Scale Scores were entered into an Excel data base for analysis using the R program. Binary logistic regression procedures were performed to classify individuals into one of two groups (employed/not employed) on the basis of their gender, race, age, and Scale Scores on the five subscales of the TABE. Logistic regression is an appropriate procedure to use to predict a categorical outcome (dependent variable) (Ramsey & Schafer, 2002). The logistic regression procedure may be used for a mix of categorical and continuous independent variables. The response variable for this study is binary, with values of 0 or 1. Two of the explanatory variables are categorical (gender and race), and the remaining six explanatory variables (age, and five different scores on the TABE) are numerical. Binary logistic regression procedures were used to analyze the data. First, the full model was analyzed using all of the variables (age, gender, race, reading, mathematical computation, applied mathematics, language, and spelling) in the model. We referred to this model as Model A. As a dimension reduction measure, the first principle component of test scores was taken as the combined test score. We called this Model B. The first principle component was scaled by dividing it by its standard deviation. This variable represents total achievement. The analysis was then conducted using the variables age, gender, race, and total achievement.

The researchers also applied the probit regression model. The results were the same as with logistic regression. In addition, interaction effects between variables in the study were checked, and model selection was performed on the basis of the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) score of the models. The lower the AIC value, the better the fit of the model. The final model selected is referred to as Model C.

Results of the Analysis

A summary of important findings is shown in Table 2. Race was suggestive (p-value = .07) of being employed (non-Caucasians hired more often than Caucasians). No other significant results were found. The odds of a non-Caucasian being employed are almost three times greater for this group than for Caucasians. [Odds = (ð/1-ð) = exponential (-1.06) = .35; 1/.35 = 2.9]. Results for Model A are displayed in Table 3.

Table 2

Summary of Important Findings

Variable	Model	Coefficient	Standard Error	z-statistic	Two-tailed p-value
race	A	-1.063	0.600	1.773	0.076
race	B	-0.857	0.546	-1.569	0.117
gender:spell	C	0.039	0.019	-2.093	0.036*

Results based on the dimension-reduced model (age, gender, race, and total achievement) again indicated that race (p-value = 0.11) was suggestive of whether or not a person was employed/not employed. None of the other variables were suggestive of whether or not a person was employed or not employed. Results for Model B are displayed in Table 4.

Results for the model selection performed on the basis of the AIC score indicated statistical significance for the interaction of gender and spelling (p = .036) and for gender (p = .036) on the response. More females than males were employed (21 compared to 17 respectively), and the mean score for females was higher on the spelling subscale than for males (747.41 compared to 740.78 respectively). Results for Model C are reported in Table 5.

Conclusions

Using the AIC values to compare the logit and probit models, it was apparent that both of these models gave virtually the same

Table 3

Logistic Regression of Employment Status (Model A)

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	z-statistic	Two-tailed p-value
Constant	4.467	4.794	0.932	0.351
gender	-0.103	0.600	-0.184	0.854
race	-1.063	0.600	1.773	0.076
age	-0.005	0.025	-0.206	0.837
reading	0.003	0.009	0.306	0.759
mathematical comprehension	0.000	0.009	0.017	0.987
applied mathematics	0.008	0.010	0.805	0.421
language	-0.005	0.010	-0.521	0.602
spelling	-0.0105	0.009	-1.138	0.255

(Dispersion parameter for binomial family taken to be 1) (AIC: 108.86)

Table 4

Logistic Regression of Employment Status (Model B)

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	z-statistic	Two-tailed p-value
Constant	1.024	1.002	1.022	0.307
gender	0.156	0.516	0.302	0.763
race	-0.857	0.546	-1.569	0.117
age	-0.012	0.024	-0.518	0.604
total achievement	-0.079	0.262	-0.302	0.763

(Dispersion parameter for binomial family taken to be 1) (AIC: 104.13)

results. Model selection performed on the basis of the AIC values indicated a significant interaction between gender and spelling and gender on the response. Females are usually considered to be more verbal than males; thus the higher spelling scores might be expected. The interaction between gender and spelling on the response variable (employed/not employed) could be due to the ability of females to complete a job application more accurately than males; thus females may appear to be more desirable employees than males.

The TABE assesses an individual's academic achievement only without regard for work habits, interpersonal skills, and attitudes toward work. However, scores on basic skills test may not be important because of the kinds of jobs that individuals were placed in (janitorial, fast foods, clerical). In other words, individuals were employed in low-paying jobs that do not require a very high level of basic academic skills. Basic academic skills alone may not lead to gainful employment. Higher-order thinking skills required to think, reason, and make sound decisions are critical for employment (Alabama Cooperative Extension System, 2000). Results suggest that non-Caucasians are employed more often than Caucasians. This finding may indicate that non-Caucasians are more willing than Caucasians to assume some of the low-paying jobs, non-Caucasians have a stronger work ethic than Caucasians, or non-Caucasians need to work more so than Caucasians.

In addition, one might conclude that variables other than basic academic skills, such as attitudes toward work, people skills, work habits, and previous work experience may be better indicators of whether an individual was employed or not. The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (1991) reported that personal qualities and interpersonal skills are critical competencies necessary for entry-level employment. Sanchez (2003) reported that an individual's knowledge of work, previous work experiences, and attitudes are important for employment. Employers value employees who have good personal attributes, respect themselves and others, come to work on time, dress appropriately, and work cooperatively as part of a team. Davis and Miller (1996) reported that knowledge of group processes and work teams are major competencies for successful employment. These skills are consistent with the personal-social skills proposed by DeMario, Rex, and Morreau (1990).

Employment of adults with disabilities continues to be a primary goal of vocational rehabilitation. Martin (2007) observed that primary goals of rehabilitation counselors are to prepare individuals for gainful employment and independent living. Testing, evaluation, and other special services such as those provided by the Achievement Center are aimed at preparing individuals with disabilities for employment. Although more individuals were employed (54%) than not employed (46%), the ratio of employed to not employed is not much greater than chance. Educational programs and rehabilitation services that facilitate the successful employment of adults will continue to be investigated in an effort to identify relevant factors that contribute to an individual's employment. Such factors may then be generalized and used in a variety of educational environments for adults with disabilities.

Table 5

Logistic Regression of Employment Status (Model C)

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	z-statistic	Two-tailed p-value
Intercept	-0.249	4.696	-0.053	0.958
race	-0.831	0.550	-1.512	0.131
gender	29.198	13.959	2.092	0.037*
spell	0.001	0.006	0.164	0.870
gender:spell	0.039	0.019	-2.093	0.036*

Signif. codes: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

(Dispersion parameter for binomial family taken to be 1)
Null deviance: 98.074 on 70 degrees of freedom
Residual deviance: 86.602 on 66 degrees of freedom
AIC: 96.602

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Correspondence about this manuscript may be sent to Marie Kraska, Ph.D, 4036 Haley Center, Auburn University, AL 36849-5221. Electronic mail may be sent to kraskamf@auburn.edu