

**Enhancing Positive Attitudes towards Learners
with Special Needs for Vocational and Technical
Education in Nigeria: Issues for Consideration**

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Introduction

The World Health Organization (1976) views disability as any restriction or lack (resulting from any impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for human being. Tassoni (2009) reported that disability is a term with many definitions and can include those having special educational needs. He also informed that disability as put by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 section 1(1) refers to those with any form of physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long terms adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-do-day activities. He further wrote that disability according to Children Act of 1989 section 17(11) refers to those who are blind, deaf, or dumb or suffers from a mental disorder of any kind or is substantially and permanently handicapped by illness, injury or congenital deformity or such other disabilities.

According to the Federal Ministry of Education (2004) all those living with disabilities both children and adults will receive education alongside with others living without disabilities in primary, secondary and higher institutions of learning without

discrimination with respect to funding, equipment, facilities, and effective services and equality. Employment laws will enable all persons living with disabilities who receive vocational training in Federal, states and all other rehabilitation centres to share employment as a right and even occupy reserved posts for persons living with disabilities in the nation's various establishments. This move by Government is quite commendable, but how is the degree of compliance in the various levels of governance in the country?

Society Attitudes towards those Living With Disabilities

Attitude may be referred to as a predisposition to responding in a particular way to a perceptual orientation or response readiness. It guides and directs the overt behavior of the individual. Some attitudes serve as a mediating construct in behavior; they often play prominent roles in the treatment of any category of people. People hold negative attitudes towards those living with disabilities in developing countries because of fear, ignorance, and cultural or societal influences. According to Shaw (1995) some people have been influenced by the negative model, which closely associated disabilities with illness. Vellenian (1979) records that those negative attitudes to people living with disabilities constitute a great problem and that the public regards them less than a whole human being, use image-loaded derogatory, insulting, and inhuman words for them. The public and the government lump all their needs together, not minding the various categories of disabilities and as a result do not meet any of their specific needs. George and Goodall (1992) also described how people living with disabilities have been treated as 'patients' by the Medical system. The depersonalization, which occur when a person's disability is discussed, rather than the individuals' needs or wishes, is particularly harmful.

Kauffman (1979) investigation on the attitude of the School Counselors and Psychotherapists found out that positive relationship of the counselor's attitude towards people living with disabilities and rehabilitation showed greater success. Also the

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Psychosocial adjustment to a large extent depends on his attitudes to the disability and to himself as well as the attitudes of the public and the caring personnel towards him and his disability. Olaniyan and Eleweke (1992) expressed their concerns for people living with disabilities educationally and vocationally as follows; 'the goal of education for these people living with disabilities is to allow them to make the most of being alive; to help them become aware of their potentials, and make use of their talents with the opportunities and challenges that life affords and thus achieve in some measure personal fulfillments'.

Career and Technical Education for those with Special Needs

Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses are electives available to all students at the high school level in most developed countries. The purpose is to provide students with training so that they can enter the workforce immediately following high school or to pursue further training at a Technical college or University. This is also practiced in some developing countries who trained those with special needs, which is very encouraging.

In another development work-based learning activities may be available to all students. This includes those with special needs. This gives the student an opportunity to apply theories and skills learned in the classroom to an actual job situation. Special needs students would select areas of career interest in the same way that all other students do. Additionally, school counselors are knowledgeable about career assessment tools which they are expected to use to guide all students. These tools are appropriate for use with students who have special educational needs.

Vocational information for those with Special Needs:

Lynch (2011) noted there is insufficient evidence in the literature that desires pre-service programmes to prepare teachers to teach vocational and technical students with special needs. Also Lynch (1991) reported that 98 colleges and Universities purport to offer programs in vocational special needs with a 3-year average enrolment increase of 14.3%. Lynch (1991) further informed that

the institutions provided specific data about the curriculum and structure of pre-service (e.g. undergraduate) programmes. It is therefore, assumed that (a) a major in vocational special needs education is typically not available at the undergraduate level; (b) instruction in teaching vocational students with special needs is included as part of the professional pre-service preparation of all subject-specific vocational education majors; (c) the undergraduate major may be in a subject area such as psychology or in a non-vocational education subject area, such as special education, and (d) extensive professional preparation for vocational special needs teachers is provided primarily at the graduate level (Lynch, 2011).

Enhancing Positive Attitudes towards Learners with Disabilities or Special Needs

Role of Legislation:

Studies concerned with attitudes change in people through the presentation of information in educational workshops should be explored. These workshops should consist of information about people living with disabilities, role playing activities and presentations of persons living with disabilities.

Information and legislation, which is an instrument, used in modern society to protect the interest and rights of citizens should be promoted. In relation to people living with disabilities, it is the information provided about such people that Government makes sure that they are provided with services at public expense to offset the effects of disabilities. Amwe (1991) advocated for services to be provided but not as a requirement. But what will be beneficial to people living with disabilities is a mandatory government legislation that will require establishments, agencies and institutions to develop and provide programmes and services for those living with disabilities. A mandatory legislation according to Turnbull (1972) will make sure that no person living with disability is excluded from free public education, that these groups of people are fairly assessed so that they can be properly placed

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and served in public schools, that they will be given an education that is meaningful to them taking their disability into account.

People living with disabilities should not be segregated inappropriately from their none disabled mates, and that each person by law has the right to protect a school's decision about his education and to make sure that each person by law has the right to protect his education and to make sure that equipment and facilities that will enhance the educational and vocational advancement of the person living with disabilities are installed.

The Role of Parents and Philanthropists:

The presence of those living with disabilities in a family obviously, alters the pattern of family life, but the family must relinquish their hopes and aspirations for their members but also establish new routines and habits, hold regular meetings of parents of persons living with similar disabilities. This will help family members to share concerns and experiences and help in overcoming feelings of isolation, anxiety and guilt. Definitely, this will promote speeding adjustment in social interaction in the society, in education and vocational training.

Majority of the people are beginning to see the need to help those living with disabilities educationally. Philanthropists have shown their concern for the educational enlistment of those living with disabilities by donating reading and writing materials which have served as a motivational factor in igniting the interest of these people in education, leading to vocational training which will give them the advantage to set up business of their own.

Attitudinal Requirements of Special Education Teachers:

In the view of Mba (1991), desirable personal characteristics of teachers that deal with those living with disabilities include the following: a high degree of patience, mental alertness, flexibility and resourcefulness, emotional stability. Other characteristics are personal warmth and friendliness, sympathy and sensitivity to children's needs. He further spelled out the characteristics not required of teachers dealing with those living with disabilities to

include: a sentimental attitude towards children and an over-zealous desire to help children with behavior problems, over-permissiveness, especially in connection with problem children, frequent resort to authorities or specialists for help, especially when things go wrong in the classroom, and lastly timidity and lack of self confidence on the part of the teacher.

Role of Government and Employers

The efforts of the National Directorate for Employment, which caters for the vocational and apprenticeship schemes in local government areas and state headquarters where those living with disabilities are taught different trades, is a good effort by Government. Many of those living with disabilities went to Yaba College of Technology, while others learn vocational/technical subject such as fabrication, auto-mechanic and building in different vocational instructions is another encouragement from Government.

Immense is the value of the positive world programme of action adopted by the United Nations as the result of the International Year of the disabled Persons, The United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons (1983 – 1992), United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Right. This action programme spells out what ought to be done to help those living with disabilities. This has encouraged those living with disabilities in their respective countries for organization of their own. This has resulted in the formation of the Nigerian Association of the Blind (N.A.B.), the Joint Association of Disabled person (JADP) Plateau State Nigeria, the Disabled People International (DPI) and the American Coalition of Citizen with Disabilities (ACCD).

Expected Role of Libraries to assist those with Special Needs

Libraries are centres for information, where information in all facets of life is expected to be gotten. It is therefore, important that there should be dedicated area in every library to take care of clients with special needs; Unisa Library (2011) highlighted special

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assigned area in its library to cover the needs of those with disabilities to include the following facilities:

- Pdf Magic – for the conversation of pdf files to plain text,
- Scam and Read – for the scanning of printed text into sound,
- Text to Audio – for the conversion of printed text into sound,
- WebIE – a free web browser for the blind,
- Dolphin Pen – to enable the magnification, speech and Braille to any Pc without having to install any additional software,
- Book Courier – a portable reading device designed for people with vision and learning disabilities that make reading difficult, and
- Eye-Pal – the Eye-Pal scans printed material and instantly converts text to speech or sends the information to a Braille display for the blind and deaf-blind.

The availability of these facilities and resources in any library will be a gateway for those with special needs to get materials or information on Vocational, Technical Education and Entrepreneurship that could be useful to them in life. This is a great challenge for other libraries in developing countries that have not attended the level Unisa library has reached in being friendly to all categories of those with special needs.

Importance of Contact

Increased exposure to people living with disabilities may decrease the discomfort felt by many people without disabilities (Lee and Rodda: 1994). The contact hypothesis seems to have some validity; contact must also be a setting that reinforces the positive image of people living with disabilities. The more frequent the contact between those living with disabilities and educators or the public, the more positive the attitude and the gains that result from such interactions. For example, educationally if there is contact with educators, their information request will be attended to promptly. Reference series, Information retrieval for assignments and project would be promptly attended to by Library staff. Equipment to develop skills for those living with disabilities need, will be installed in the appropriate areas and centers. This positive

demonstration of accepting those living with disabilities will lead to excellent performance in their examination and degree results. Their certificates will be tenable for employment and placement, and the right employment will be granted, self adequacy and self-reliance will be achieved by those living with disabilities.

Information plus increased contact appears to be the most effective strategy for achieving positive attitude modification and a combination of strategies mentioned above are more powerful than contact or information alone. Lee and Rodda (1994) view information as a vital indicator to provide new knowledge to the belief system, and this leads to the change of attitude, and then the contact services to reinforce the validity of the acquired information.

Suggestions/Recommendations

- Government employment laws should ensure that all persons living with disabilities who received vocational training in Federal and State Rehabilitation centers share employment as a right. The law should make it mandatory for employers to employ a fixed percentage of those living with disabilities and reserving posts or types of jobs for them in their establishments.
- Employers need to remove misgivings about employing persons living with disabilities and treat them with equality with their able counterparts.
- Government to declare by legislation and set a deadline by which all existing buildings and services occupied by government departments, local authorities and other State bodies to be made full accessible to those living with disabilities. Government should also ensure that the curricular of architecture and civil engineering disciplines will be made accessible to persons living with disabilities.
- Public transportation, all schools, colleges and universities must be made accessible to all categories of those living with disabilities.

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- Libraries in the developing countries should be friendly to all categories of those living with disabilities.

Conclusion

In order to provide appropriate education, vocationally and otherwise for those people living with disabilities, the society should overcome the misperception about people living with disabilities and develop understanding and positive attitude. Also, this article is expected to serve as a handy information package to the people living with disabilities themselves, governments, educators, legislators and employers when making policy decisions that are affecting the people living with disabilities educationally and vocationally.

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