

## Acquisition of Technical and Vocational Skills for Emerging Employment Opportunities: Challenges Faced by Youths with Disabilities in Urban Areas of Niger State, Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

The study determined challenges faced by youth with disabilities in acquisition of technical and vocational skills and strategies for enhancing youth with disabilities acquisition of technical and vocational skills. Two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. The study employed descriptive survey research design. The population size that formed the respondents was 22 persons that consisted of 19 technical college teachers and three special need teacher with special skill in Niger State. The instrument used for data collection was a 15-item structured questionnaire. To ensure that the instrument elicit the information it was designed, it was subjected to content validation and the suggestions and corrections made by the experts were reflected on the final copy of the instrument. The reliability coefficient of the instrument was established to be 0.86 using Cronbach Alpha formula. Data collected was analysed using mean for research questions and t-test for hypotheses. Results revealed 9 challenges hindering youth with disabilities in acquisition of technical and vocational skills and 6 strategies for enhancing youth with disabilities acquisition of technical and vocational skills. Finding on challenges hindering youth with disabilities in acquisition of technical and vocational skills are shortage of special skilled trained personnel, lack of basic framework to fare distribution of technical and vocational education resources, insensitive curriculum of the special needs to technical and vocational skill training, insensitivity of the infrastructure to conditions of the disabilities while strategies for enhancing youth with disabilities acquisition of technical and vocational skills include establishment of technical and vocational training programmes as a department in all special schools, integration of technical and vocational skill into the curriculum of special need, provision of facilities and infrastructure that recognizes individualized abilities of the disables among others. It is recommended that government should develop an inclusive framework that will mandate concerned authorities to providing infrastructure, facility and equipment that meet the needs of person living with disabilities in Niger State.

**Keywords:** Skill Acquisition, Technical Vocational Education and Training, and Disabilities

## INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, the importance of skill acquisition can never be over emphasised. Skill is an essential tool for the nation's economic recovery, poverty reduction and sustainable development (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 2021). Skill acquisition is seen as that aspect of training that exposes the learner or an individual to acquiring demonstrable abilities that could be transformed into economic benefits (Oyama & Oyama, 2022). In Nigeria acquisition of demonstrable abilities necessary for economic transformation are acquired through Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET).

Technical and Vocational Education and Training is a form of education that prepares individuals for employment in an occupation (Iroegbu, 2023). The purpose of TVET is to empower individuals by developing their creative and manipulative potentials in preparation for employment. Kenechukwu *et al.* (2022) sees TVET as a deliberate education intervention designed to instil in learners the essential skills required to make them more productive and effective in diverse areas of economic activity targeted at income generation for the survival of self and the nation at large. More precisely, the Federal government of Nigeria defined TVET as a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related science, the acquisition of knowledge, practical skills and attitude relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life (FRN, 2014). TVET promotes the acquisition and development of attitude, skills and abilities needed to function effectively in the world of work (Kenechukwu *et al.*, 2022).

The importance of TVET in transforming Nigerian economy cannot be over emphasized. United Nations, Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (2021) and Agu & Kaduhur (2017) enumerates the benefits of TVET to include stimulation of technological and industrial development through the production of competent and workers who are capable of utilizing the abundant natural and human resources for economic and industrial growth, development of local technology through indigenous technicians and technologists, solution to unemployment. More importantly, the justification for increase investment in TVET by government and development partners is primarily due to the growing youth unemployment (International Labour Organisation, 2022). As such TVET is perceived as a tool or programme that essentially unveils the various economic transformation areas so that the abilities needed to expertly handle tasks in such areas can be acquired.

The acquisition of training experience is necessary for the transmission of knowledge and skills that are related to various occupations needed for human empowerment for emerging employment opportunities. To adequately provide trained manpower for the emerging employment opportunities, the Federal government of Nigeria (FRN, 2014) has fashioned various occupational skills needed for the present day work places to be acquired through TVET. Anaela, Adhlakun, Olumoko, & Kanu, (2014) enumerates the occupational areas to include automobile electricity, building, business studies, clothing and textile, computer hard and software, drafting and designing, electrical/electronics, equipment servicing, metalwork, motor vehicle body work, motor vehicle mechanic work, woodwork. To adequately provide trained manpower necessary for the country's economic growth and sustain skilled labour FRN (2014) provides equal opportunity for full participation in the acquisition of the skills and abilities in these various occupations to all citizens including those with disability.

Disability is a physical or mental condition that limits a person's movements, senses or activities (Oxford English Dictionary, 2021). Disability is a physical, mental or developmental condition that impairs, interferes with or limits a person's ability to engage in certain tasks or participate in typical daily activities. Persons with disability are individual who have physical or mental condition that keeps her from living a functional life which is deem to be normal for their peers (WeCapable, 2021). As a result of the physical or mental condition that people with disability live with, they are usually unable to live a normal life. Because of the condition of the disabled, their function and operation in the world of work is limited making a disproportionate percentage of the disabled persons to be unemployed (United Nations, Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 2017). Explanations for these low rates of employment include deficit in or inadequate social skills (Osuyi and Oabnewa, 2019). Osuyi and Oabnewa (2019) observed that since the normal working life situation of the disabled is attacked by their condition, the disabled are found to be very skilled hence they advanced in the development of their skills rather than pursue conventional education. Osuyi and Oabnewa (2019) noted further that due to the features that characterized institutions of technical and vocational skill programmes, the disabled are presented with several challenges. Some of these challenges include lack of principal framework to fare distribution of educational resources and opportunities leading to shortage of training materials, infrastructures such as technical and vocational skill buildings and sitting arrangement that is insensitive to the needs of the disabled, insensitive curriculum of the special needs to technical and vocational skill programmes, lack of special skilled personnel that are skilled in various technical and vocational skill to facilitate adequate training of disabled, community perception. Overcoming these hindrances involves providing an inclusive technical and vocational skill for the disabilities that employ transmission techniques, assessment techniques and equipment accessibility and utilization that recognize individual kinds of abilities (Umar and Rashid, 2019).

Notwithstanding the realization that the disabled are found to advance more in the development of their skills rather than pursue conventional education since their operations in normal life situation is limited, still several challenges are obviously encountered by the disabled in acquisition of technical and vocational skills. This necessitated a study to ascertain challenges faced by youth with disabilities in acquisition of technical and vocational skill for emerging employment opportunities in Urban Areas of Niger State, Nigeria.

### **Objective of the Study**

1. To determine challenges faced by youth with disabilities in acquisition of technical and vocational skills
2. To determine strategies for enhancing youth with disabilities acquisition of technical and vocational skills

### **Research Question**

1. What are challenges faced by youth with disabilities in acquisition of technical and vocational skills?
2. What are strategies for enhancing youth with disabilities acquisition of technical and vocational skills

### **Hypotheses**

HO<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant difference between respondents' responses regarding challenges faced by youth with disabilities in acquisition of technical and vocational skills

HO<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant difference between respondents' responses regarding strategies for enhancing youth with disabilities acquisition of technical and vocational skills.

**METHODOLOGY**

The study employed descriptive survey research design. The study was conducted in Niger State, Nigeria. The population of the study who are skilled teachers in Government Technical College, Minna (N<sub>1</sub> = 19) and special skilled teachers in school for persons with special need Minna (N<sub>2</sub> = 3) was 22 respondents. Government Technical College, Minna and school for persons with special need, Minna were chosen because they are TVET institutions situated in the urban region of Niger State. A 15 item structured questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection, nine items on challenges faced by youth with disabilities and six items on strategies for enhancing youth with disabilities acquisition of technical and vocational skills. To ensure that the instrument elicit the information it was designed, it was subjected to content validation and the suggestions and corrections made by these experts were reflected on the final copy of the instrument. A Four Point Rating Scale with the following response scale: Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1 was employed as response options in order to reduce neutral bias and encourage more decisive responses. Using Cronbach Alpha formula for the pilot test, the reliability coefficient of the instrument was established to be 0.86. After administration of the instrument data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation statistics for the research questions while t-test was used to test the hypotheses. With reference to the 4-point response scale, real limit of numbers was used as decision rule.

**RESULTS**

**Table 1: Challenges faced by Youth with Disabilities in Acquisition of Technical and Vocational Skills**

S/N	Challenges faced by youth with disabilities in acquisition of technical and vocational skills	$\bar{X}_1$	SD <sub>1</sub>	$\bar{X}_2$	SD <sub>2</sub>	$\bar{X}_A$	Decision
1	Shortage of special skilled trained personnel	3.35	0.63	2.55	0.41	2.95	Agree
2	Lack of basic framework to fare distribution of technical and vocational education resources	3.40	0.70	3.03	0.82	3.21	Agree
3	Shortage of training materials/equipment	3.21	0.73	3.33	0.82	3.27	Agree
4	Insensitivity of the infrastructure to conditions of the disabilities	2.62	0.66	2.38	0.41	2.50	Agree
5	Insensitive curriculum of the special needs to technical and vocational skill training	3.44	0.65	2.32	0.51	2.88	Agree
6	Lack of participation of private partners	3.29	0.54	2.01	0.52	2.65	Agree

in the provision of technical and vocational skills to the disabilities

7	Lack of technical and vocational skill centres with dedicated training machines tools and equipment needs for different forms of disabilities	2.37	0.50	3.33	0.82	2.85	Agree
8	Introduction of special skill centres that renders both social and vocational rehabilitation	3.05	0.53	.2.95	0.82	3.00	Agree
9	Lack of funding technical and vocational skill training	2.50	0.68	3.17	0.75	2.83	Agree

Table 1 present results on the challenges faced by youth with disabilities in acquisition of technical and vocational skills in Niger State. The nine items had average mean values between 2.50 to 3.27. Based on the concept of real limit of numbers, these values indicated that the respondents agreed with all the nine items. Thus, the nine items were challenges hindering the youths with disabilities in acquisition of technical and vocational skills.

**Table 2: Strategies for Enhancing Youth with Disabilities Acquisition of Technical and Vocational Skills**

S/N	Strategies for enhancing youth with disabilities acquisition of technical and vocational skills	$\bar{X}_1$	SD <sub>1</sub>	$\bar{X}_2$	SD <sub>2</sub>	$\bar{X}_A$	Decision
1	Establishment of technical and vocational training programmes as a department in all special schools	3.35	0.72	3.00	0.82	3.17	Agree
2	Provision of special non-formal technical and vocational skill acquisition centres to provide direct skill training to the disabilities who are not able to received special education	3.19	0.73	3.33	0.52	3.26	Agree
3	Provision of facilities and infrastructure that recognizes individualized abilities of the disables	3.23	0.59	2.67	0.52	2.95	Agree
4	Integration of technical and vocational skill into the curriculum of special need	2.26	0.65	3.04	0.54	2.65	Agree
5	Provision of special mobility to convey the disabilities to and fro training centres	3.33	0.70	2.57	0.55	2.95	Agree
6	Provision of deliberate policy designed to help persons with disabilities acquire	3.15	0.63	3.17	0.99	3.16	Agree

technical and vocational skills via private partnership advocacy

Table 2 present strategies for enhancing youth with disabilities acquisition of technical and vocational skills. The result revealed that the average mean ratings of the items range from 2.65 to 3.26. This result indicates that the respondents agreed that these items are strategies for enhancing youth with disabilities acquisition of technical and vocational skills.

**Table 3: t-test Analysis of Challenges faced by Youth with Disabilities in acquisition of Technical and Vocational Skills**

Group	N	t-cal	t-crit	df	Mean Difference	Decision
Technical teachers	19			20	0.18	Not Significant
Special school teachers	3	0.07	1.96		0.18	Significant

Table 3 is the t-test analysis of challenges faced by youth with disabilities in acquisition of technical and vocational skills in Niger State. The table revealed t-calculated value to be 0.07. Since 0.07 (t-cal) is less than 1.96 table value at  $0.05\alpha$  df20, the null hypothesis is upheld. This implies that the difference is not significant. Hence there was no significant difference between respondents' responses regarding challenges faced by youth with disabilities in acquisition of technical and vocational skills.

**Table 4: t-test Analysis of strategies for Enhancing Youth with Disabilities Acquisition of Technical and Vocational Skills**

Group	N	t-cal	t-crit	df	Mean Difference	Decision
Technical teachers	19			20	-1.08	Not Significant
Special school teachers	3	-0.43	1.96		-1.08	Not Significant

Table 4 is the t-test analysis of strategies for enhancing youth with disabilities acquisition of technical and vocational skills in Niger State. The table revealed t-calculated value to be -0.43. Since -0.43 (t-cal) is less than 1.96 table value at  $0.05\alpha$  df20, the null hypothesis is hence upheld. This implies that the difference is not significant. This shows that there was no significant difference between respondents' responses regarding strategies for enhancing youth with disabilities acquisition of technical and vocational skills.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings of the study in Table 1 provide the challenges faced by youth with disabilities in acquisition of technical and vocational skills in Niger State. These challenges are factors that militate against youths with disabilities in acquisition of technical and vocational skills. The challenges revealed are shortage of special skilled trained personnel for training the disabled, lack of training materials, lack of basic framework to fare distribution of TVET resources, lack of funding for technical and vocational skill training, insensitive curriculum of the special needs to

technical and vocational training, lack of participation of private partners to providing technical and vocational skills to the disabilities, lack of technical and vocational centres with dedicated training machines tools and equipment needs for different forms of disabilities, lack of special skill centres that renders both social and vocational rehabilitation and insensitivity of the infrastructure to conditions of disabilities. This result is in line with Iroegbu (2023) and Gyamfi *et al.* (2018) that revealed that dedicated machines, tools and equipment, machines and infrastructure that will enhance skills acquisition of the disabled persons are lacking.

One major challenge synonymous with Osuyi and Oabnewa (2019) is shortage of special skilled personnel and insensitivity of curriculum of the special needs to technical and vocational skills. Special skilled teachers and curriculum of the special needs is the first thing that comes to mind when discussing skills acquisition. Where skill teachers are lacking and curriculum that specifies skills to be acquired is short of skill content, shortage of skilled manpower is inevitable. Umar and Rashid (2019) encourage all-inclusive participation in provision of skill training to the disabilities because government alone cannot adequately provide technical and vocational training. Contrary to this advocacy, there is lack of participation of private partners in the provision of technical and vocational skills to the disabled in Niger State. This situation greatly limit opportunities of persons with disabilities in skills acquisition since the government alone cannot adequately provide skill training.

Finding presented in Table 2 revealed strategies for enhancing youth with disabilities acquisition of technical and vocational skills. The strategies proffer solution to the challenges militating against skills acquisition of youth with disabilities. They include establishment of vocational training programmes as a department in all special schools, provision of deliberate policy designed to help persons with disabilities acquire technical and vocational skills via existing special education, provision of facilities and infrastructure that recognizes individualized abilities of the disables, integration of technical and vocational skill into the curriculum of special need, provision of special mobility to convey the disabilities to and fro training centres, provision of special non-formal technical and vocational skill acquisition centres to provide direct skill training to the disabilities who are not able to received special education.

The increasing economic demand for skilled manpower presents opportunities for persons with disabilities to secure paid or self-employment. However, the current state of facilities and resources remains a major constraint to their effective skill development. To address this limitation, Kenechukwu *et al.* (2022) and Gyamfi *et al.* (2018) in support of this finding also emphasized the need for adequately resourced technical and vocational training programmes that will enable teachers and administrators to effectively deliver and manage skill training. Result on provision of policy to help persons with disabilities acquire technical and vocational skills through private partnership is a good avenue for easing financial burden on the government. Private partners can help in areas of mobilization of the disabled for training and bringing technical and vocational skill training to the disabled by provision of special non-formal technical and vocational skill acquisition centres to provide direct skill training to those who are not able to received special education through counter funding. In a similar study, Yusof *et al.* (2014) revealed that technical and vocational training is an integral component of the Malaysian special need curriculum such that vocational school leavers with disabilities gain Malaysian skill certificate at different level of impairment. This shows that introduction of technical and vocational training in all special schools

and integration of technical and vocational skill programme into the curriculum of special need is a right step towards overcoming the challenges facing the disabilities in acquiring technical and vocational skill in Niger State.

## CONCLUSION

Findings from this study reveal that, despite the preference of persons with disabilities for acquiring technical and vocational skills, owing to differences in their abilities to learn such skills, they face numerous challenges that hinder effective skill acquisition. These challenges include shortage of special trained teachers, insensitivity of the available infrastructure to needs of persons living with disabilities among others. Nevertheless, the employability of persons with disabilities who possess adequate technical and vocational skills can be achieved by creating an enabling and inclusive school environment that recognizes diverse abilities, as well as through the involvement of private-sector partners to reduce the burden on government in the provision of technical and vocational training for persons with disabilities.

## RECOMMENDATION

1. The government is encouraged to develop an inclusive framework that will mandate concerned authorities to provide infrastructure, facility and equipment that meet the needs of the disabilities in Niger State.
2. More government advocacy is required to encourage private partnership participation in provision of Technical and vocational training to persons living with disabilities such as assisting the government in establishment of technical and vocational training programmes as a department in all special schools and provision of special non-formal technical and vocational skill acquisition centres to provide direct skill training to the disabilities.

## IMPLICATIONS

Implementing the identified strategies can help create a more inclusive workforce by enabling youth with disabilities to gain access to TVET and subsequently, employment opportunities. Thus, youth with disabilities can become economically self-sufficient, reducing their reliance on social support systems and contributing to the economy.

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