



Attitude of the Society Towards the Mainstreaming of Vocational Education for Persons with Disabilities in Owerri Municipal Council of Imo State

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Abstract

The paper focused on the attitude of the society towards the mainstreaming of vocational education for persons with disabilities. It was conducted in Owerri Municipal Council of Imo State. The study assessed both the societies' perception towards the mainstreaming of vocational education for persons with disabilities and possible solutions to the challenges encountered in the education of persons with disabilities. Thus, two purposes and two research questions guided the study. It adopted a descriptive survey design. a researcher made questionnaire which consist of eight items was used as the instrument for data collection. The sample for the study was 70 respondents comprising 14 teachers and 56 students of special needs education schools. Data obtained from the study through the questionnaire were compiled and analyzed in the table using mean and standard deviation. Findings indicated amongst others that government does not provide adequate facilities for the teaching of Vocational Education to disabled children, funds allocated be utilize for Vocational Education to disabled children are not properly utilized; and employment are not be offered to disabled children. some recommendations were made base on the findings which includes amongst others that Government should make sure that the funds and basic amenities allocated to Vocational Education for disabled children. are well utilized so that teaching and learning would take place in a conducive environment.

Keyword: Attitude, Mainstreaming, Vocational Education and Persons with Disabilities.

Introduction

When persons with disabilities have access to vocational education, they make significant contributions in society, work and earn a standard living for themselves and their households. The World Health Organization (WHO) (2013) describes disability as an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitation, and participation restrictions. The impairment being a problem in body function or structure an activity limitation being a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while participation restriction is termed a problem experienced by an individual in gettinginvolved in life situations. Disability is thus not just a health problem, but a complex phenomenon, reflecting the interaction between features of a person's body and features of the society in which he/she lives. Impairment can occur from birth or any time over the course of an individual's life, either permanently or temporarily.

The attitude of society, government and citizen on persons with disabilities had been highly negative and degrading, where the disabled were thought to be incapable of contributing

anything meaningful to the society (Okwelle, 2011). Government affording them the opportunity to acquire skills will help the disabled to be productive and useful in society so as to ignore this notion and attitude of society towards them. Given the serious disadvantaged situation of persons with disabilities, special measures need to be taken to equalize their opportunities to enroll in the vocational training programmes available in each country. One of such measures is the introduction of mainstreaming.

Mainstreaming is the processes of integrating children with special education problems into conventional classes and school activities. The concept ensures that special need persons learn in the same class with the normal children, rather than in a separate learning environment. The essence is to avoid segregation and feelings of worthlessness occasioned by discrimination and stigmatization.

Mainstreaming which is an educational provision and technique for persons with disabilities is useful in the impartation of vocational education and skills for the sustainability of persons with disability. If fully implemented, it will not only erase the negative label on disabled children, but will restore their self-worth and increase their self-concepts to participate and contribute to the development of services and the society. It will also modify the negative attitudes of the society towards the physically and mentally challenged individuals and thus make them feel well-adjusted in the society especially through trainings and skill acquisition from Vocational Education.

Vocational Education is education within vocational schools that prepares students for a specific trade and directly develops expertise related to technology, skills and scientific techniques to span all aspects of the trade (Maris, 2010) it is also an educational training that provides practical experience in a particular occupational field, as agriculture, home economics, or industry so as to equip the individual for job acquisition (Okwelle, 2011). Vocational education, also known as career and technical education can also be explain as education that prepares people for crafts and career at various levels or a high professional practitioner position in engineering, accountancy (Victor, 2012). It can also be explained as those aspects of education process involving, in addition, to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life (UNESCO 2011). Williams (2009), opined that vocational skills are needed for enterprise productivity and profitability, as well as for national productivity and wealth creation. Without the necessary vocational education, enterprise and national growth can be seriously hobbled. The need for technical and vocational skills is increasing because of a convergence of factors including technological change, changes in work organization, growing economic openness and competitiveness, and capital deepening (increasing capital per worker).

According to Okoye (2007), the term vocational education generally includes every form of education that aimed at the acquisition of qualifications related to a certain profession, art or employment or that provides the necessary training and appropriate skills. Vocational skill can also be regarded as the part of vocational education that provides the specialized professional knowledge and skills, which attribute professional adequacy to the trainee which is the focus of every vocational training program (Williams 2009). According to Steedman (2009), vocational



education enterprises facilitate the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge, which is a planned program of courses and learning experiences that begins with exploration of career options, supports basic academic and life skills. Also, Nuru (2007) indicated that a change in a country's economy is required to prepare young ones for the jobs of the future and reduce poverty among the rural area. Vocational education has important roles to play in this process as it has been an integral part of national development.

Diogu (2009) also posited that the neglect of vocational education in the area of adequate personnel, financial support and facilities are robbing the nation of the contribution their graduates would make in the economy. Also, Asogwa (2007) maintained that there is an urgent need for people's attention to be redirected towards self-reliant and sustainable means of livelihood which vocational education provides in support of economic development. To enable persons with disabilities access varied opportunities created by vocational education requires that their mindset and attitudes as well as those of the society must be directed positively.

Attitude can be explained as predispositions towards behavior. Attitudes are learned, and are influenced by the amount of knowledge and contact as regarding particular issue or group thus, an individual's attitude towards something will affect that person's behavior. A close view from Agulanna and Nwachukwu (2014), describes attitude refers to how one behaves and feels towards, persons, institutions and events. Positive or favorable attitudes are associated with approach tendencies and feelings of joy, while negative attitudes are associated with avoidance, withdrawal and dissatisfaction. Attitude is a complex mental state involving beliefs, feelings and values. It is a disposition to act or behave, and think in certain ways.

According to Penny Tassoni (2003), the way we think about disability affects the care and education we offer. It is important to understand that discriminating against people with disabilities has been an aged long tradition as disability was perceived to be a "curse" and stigma upon the child and his or her family. This belief or negative attitudes towards disabilities were probably founded on ignorance, poverty and religious bigotry. Today, the society is still faced with the remnants of these attitudes even though it is no longer as a result of ignorance and poverty, as we are a relatively well-educated and the society is prospering. The non-disabled society has a stereotype attitude towards person with disabilities or children with special needs (Ferran, 2005). This makes them grow up thinking that they are unworthy and uneducable. When the learners with disabilities are labeled by their non-disabled society/parents, then all their other behaviours and characteristics are coloured by the label. The result of labeling leads to the development of negative self-concept of learners with disabilities.

The negative self-concept leads to the formation of self-destructive ideas and attitudes expressed in their daily transactions. However, some children have been helped to change these irrational beliefs as they have realized that they are capable of performing better in their education (Ferran, 2005). Those who have gone to school and disregarded the attitude of society towards them have excelled and become successful in life even better than their able-bodied counter parts. With change in the thinking about children, learners with disabilities are capable of becoming what they want to become and be useful members of society, which is the crux of special education.

Accordingly, Obani (2014) opined that special education is the education specially designed to suit the special needs children who may experience learning problems and learning difficulties as a result of disabilities or handicaps of other forms of Special Educational needs. Special Education utilizes facilities, materials and equipment in imparting worthwhile knowledge, values, beliefs and skills into the exceptional children who are the concerns of special education (Adebiwole & Bolaji, 2011). Thani (2006) holds that adequate funding is crucial to the successful implementation of Special Education programme. This is because more is required to employ desired manpower and maintain infrastructural facilities, instructional materials and to cope with emergencies arising from expansion and implementation of mainstreaming especially in Vocational Education.

Statement of the Problem

In Nigeria, healthy and "normal" children (without disabilities) are apparently the expectation of families within the society. Therefore, the society tends to exhibit a completely different attitude towards persons with disabilities against the ones born "normal". The impact of this negative attitude towards the education of children with persons with disabilities has apparently affected the psychological, sociological and educational development of the children within the society. It has been observed that disabled children are automatically given lower standards than those without disabilities. This however affects their level of adjustment in school, their attitude towards studies resulting to low academic performance. There is need therefore to address the equality of education given to these children with disability to enable them fully contribute their own quota to development of the nation. There exist to the researchers' knowledge, little or no research on the attitude of the society towards mainstreaming using the variables adopted in this study, the researcher therefore wish to fill this perceived gap by investigate the attitude of the society towards the mainstreaming of vocational education for persons with disabilities in Owerri Municipal Council of Imo State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine the attitude of the society towards the mainstreaming of vocational education for persons with disabilities in Owerri Municipal Council. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Find out the perception of the society towards mainstreaming of vocational training for persons with disabilities in Owerri Municipal Council.
2. Find out the possible solutions to mainstreaming of Vocational Education for persons with disability in Owerri Municipal Council, Imo State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the perceptions of the society towards the mainstreaming of vocational education for persons with disability in Owerri Municipal Council?
3. What are the possible solutions to mainstreaming of Vocational Education for persons with disability in Owerri Municipal Council, Imo State?



Methodology

A descriptive survey research design was employed to carry out this study. The aim of the design was to record, analyze and interpret the existing conditions or variables. The study was carried out in Owerri Municipal Council in Imo State. The population for this study comprised of teachers and students of the special needs education schools in Owerri Municipal Council. The teachers were fourteen (14) and students were ninety-four (94) and total is one hundred and eight (108) altogether. This is according to records obtained from the principal of special education Resource Centre Owerri, and Ministry of Education, Owerri (Special Children Unit, year).

The instrument for data collection was a researcher made questionnaire titled. "Attitude of the Society Towards Mainstream of Vocational Education for persons with disabilities"(ASTMPD), which was divided into two section, section A and B. section A sought the bio data of the respondents while section B consisted of eight questions which elicited the responses on the Attitude of the Society Towards Mainstream of Vocational Education for persons with disabilities. Two experts in measurement and evaluation and one Vocational Educationist validated the study. Reliability of the instrument was obtained using Cronbach Alpha method and 0.87 was obtained which is high and significant. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of the society towards the mainstreaming of Vocational Education for persons with disability in Owerri Municipal Council?

Table 1:

The Perceptions of the Society towards the Mainstreaming of Vocational Education for Persons with Disability in Owerri Municipal Council.

S/N	Item Statement	SA 4	A 3	SD 2	D 1	$\sum fx$	N	X	Decision
1	Government provides adequate facilities to aid the teaching and learning of Vocational Education to disabled children.	6	16	28	20	148	70	2.11	Disagree
2	Funds allocated for the Vocational Education to disabled children are properly utilized.	1	6	33	30	118	70	1.68	Disagree
3	Parents and teacher's cultural and belief systems, affect the Vocational Education to disabled children.	30	20	13	7	213	70	3.04	Agree
4	Disabled children are easily offered employment in the society after graduation	16	5	19	30	147	70	2.1	Disagree

Table 1 shows that respondents disagree with the mean of 2.11, 1.68 and 2.1 respectively implying that; the government provide adequate facilities for the teaching of Vocational Education to disabled children., funds allocated be utilize for Vocational Education to disabled children are properly utilized; and employment should be offered to disabled children. The respondents agree with the mean of 3.5 that parents and teacher’s cultural belief system affects the Vocational Education to disabled children.

Research Question 2: What are the possible solutions to mainstreaming of Vocational Education for persons with disability in Owerri Municipal Council, Imo State?

Table 2

The Possible Solutions to Mainstreaming of Vocational Education for Persons with Disability in Owerri Municipal Council, Imo State.

S/N	Item Statement	SA 4	A 3	SD 2	D 1	$\sum fx$	N	X	Decision
1	There is a need to provide a conducive learning environment for the Vocational Education of disabled children.	43	10	9	8	228	70	3.25	Agree
2	Extensive training of parents and teachers by professionals will correct the nonchalant attitude towards Vocational Education of disabled children.	54	6	-	-	234	70	3.34	Agree
3	The national policy should accommodate the Vocational Education of disabled children and parents’ policy planning.	36	19	9	6		70	3.21	Agree
4	Establishment of more Vocational Education Centres will enhance the implementation of mainstreaming program for disabled children.	46	11	13	-	243	70	3.47	Agree

From Table 2 item 1, 2, 3, and 4 with mean of 3.25, 3.34, 3.21 and 3.47 shows that the respondents agree to the possible solutions to mainstreaming of Vocational Education for persons with disability in Owerri Municipal Council, Imo State.

Discussion of Findings

Findings indicates that government does not provide adequate facilities for the teaching of Vocational Education to disabled children, funds allocated be utilize for Vocational Education to disabled children are not properly utilized; and employment are not be offered to disabled children. It however agrees that parents and teacher’s cultural belief system affects the Vocational Education to disabled children. This result depicts discouragement, shame and isolation. this is in line with the findings of Ferran (2005) is in support of this motion as he believes that the non-disabled society has a stereotype attitude towards persons with disabilities



or special children. When the learners with disabilities are considered abnormal by their non-disabled society/parents, then all their other behaviours and characteristics are coloured by the label. Findings also indicated that the society experience challenges as regards the education of special children. The respondents disagreed with the fact that government provide adequate facilities to aid teaching and learning of persons with disabilities, and that funds allocated for the persons with disabilities are properly utilized.

It was also revealed that most of their parents are attached by cultural beliefs hence they do not encourage their education because they believe that they are wasting their funds and effort on them because at the long run they will amount to nothing in the society. So, they prefer to channel that time on their siblings who are not disable therefore neglecting them. The founding also showed that special needs children are not offered automatic employment after the completion of their academic training. This makes it hard for them to survive as they are not employed nor empowered.

Again, findings from the data analyzed revealed the possible solutions to the challenges encountered in the education of persons with disabilities. All respondents agreed to the fact that there is need to provide a conducive learning environment for the persons with disabilities, organization of enlightening programs for parents and teachers will correct the nonchalant attitude towards the education of persons with disabilities, the national policy on education should recommend the persons with disabilities and parents in policy planning, and more special schools should be established by both government and private sector, for the training of children with special needs. The findings are in line with the assertions in the National Policy on education which provides for equal education opportunities and facilities for all citizens.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers hereby make the following recommendations:

1. The society should be enlightened on the efficacy of Vocational Education for disabled children.
2. Parents of disabled children should encourage Vocational Education for disabled children as disability is not lack of ability, goal, dreams and aspiration; it is also not a limitation to them. The persons with disabilities are equally important and can be useful in future.
3. Government should make sure that the funds and basic amenities allocated to Vocational Education for disabled children. are well utilized so that teaching and learning would take place in a conducive environment.

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