



Academic support services for improving the education of physically challenged adults in Delta State

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Abstract

The study examined the academic support services for improving the education of physically challenged adults in Delta State. A research question and hypothesis guided the study. Descriptive research design was used for the study. The population of the study consisted of 126 physically challenged adults in Delta State. There was no sampling. Questionnaire was the instrument for data collection. Mean and t-test was employed to answer the research question. The findings of the study revealed that the physically challenged adults disagreed on nature of academic support services provided for improving the education of the physically challenged adults in Delta State. It was recommended, among others, that Government should take measures to improve the education of physically challenged adults by providing them with adequate teaching methods, instructional materials, learning aids, and resource facilities in the inclusion settings. It was also recommended that Government should work together with NGOs to provide accommodation adapted for the needs of the learners, professional care staff and support assistance from volunteers.

Keywords: academic, support services, physically challenged, adults

Introduction

Education for all is a necessary means to emancipate man from the shackles of ignorance and poverty. Enabling man to have access to education is fundamental to his personal growth and is crucial to the development and advancement of man in the contemporary society. Irrespective of man's ability and disability of any nature, to have access to academic institutions is a necessity. This is why the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, 2018) in its Goal 4 emphasized inclusive and equitable quality education and promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all; focuses on eliminating gender disparities in education, and ensuring equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals in the society; including persons with other forms of disabilities. In this study, physically challenged is also referred to disability; both will be used interchangeably.

Therefore, disability is a world-wide phenomenon that has no boundary and cuts across countries, sex, age, religion, race, Social status, economic and political positions. Its prevalence and incidences in the contemporary world are highly worrisome. It is estimated that there are more than 2 billion physically challenged people worldwide and majority are from developing countries (Haruna, 2017) [6]. The United Nations (UN) projected that in every ten persons in Nigeria, one person is suffering from one type of disability or the other and about 90 percent of persons with disabilities are out of school in Nigeria. The World Health Organisation estimated that there are approximately 29 million disabled people living in Nigeria, (equivalent to 30% of the country's total population), although there are no robust, statistical data that either confirms or refutes this estimate (WHO, 2017).

According to the United Nation Development Programme (UNDP, 2017) the literacy rate for people with disabilities is

3%, while the literacy rate for women and girls with Disabilities are as low as 1%. In other words, physically challenged females are less likely to acquire education compared to their male counterparts.

The term physical challenge is conventionally used to refer to attributes that are severe enough to interfere with, or prevent normal day to day activities of the individual (Lydia, 2014) [10]. The United Nations as cited in Lydia (2014) [10] defined persons with physical challenge as persons who have long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments, which in interaction with various barrier may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. Physically challenged can therefore be seen as any significant condition that makes it difficult for a person to function maximally. Forms of physical challenge include balanced disorder, mental health and emotional challenged and developmental physical challenged (Bock & Borders, 2012) [3]. This can be as a result of congenital defects, hereditary and environmental influences, like accident and diseases.

Physically challenged people, irrespective of where they live, are statistically more likely to be unemployed, illiterate, to have less formal education, and have less access to developed support networks and social capital than their able-bodied counterparts (Department for International Development, 2008). Similarly, Obiozor and Obidiegwu (2013) asserted that adults who are suffering from unidentified or undiagnosed disabilities have some intellectual challenges, problematic living and working conditions in their communities.

In 1999, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) policy was adopted and enacted into law in 2004 as the UBE Act. This led to the establishment of Special Education in Nigeria. Special education is a specially designed programme targeted at supporting individuals with disabilities or

exceptional individuals in the society to acquire literacy and vocational skills, for them to be able to discover and utilize effectively their talents and skills for self-improvement and survival (Obiozor & Pang, 2009) ^[16]. Broadly speaking, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013) on its National Policy on Education highlighted that the aims of Special education include;

1. Provide access to education for all persons, in an inclusive setting;
2. Equalize education opportunities for all persons, irrespective of their generic composition, social, physical, sensory, mental, psychological or emotional disabilities;
3. Provide adequate education for all persons with special needs in order that they may fully contribute their own quota to the development of the nation;
4. Provide opportunities for exceptionally gifted and talented persons to develop their talents, natural endowment/traits at their own pace in the interest of national development; and
5. Design a diversified and appropriate curriculum for the different target groups.

Irrespective of the fact that there is provision for adults living with disabilities, this category of persons are faced with lack of accessible infrastructural facilities in academic institutions, poor enrollment, and competent educators with right andragogical skills to manage their physical, intellectual and emotional needs (Ilayaraja & Manoharan, 2012). These problems call for a need for academic institutions to integrate the physically challenged adults in the institutional planning through providing some well-structured buildings, disability friendly environment, social infrastructure, accessible libraries and support services that can accommodate all forms of disabilities.

Nevertheless, as at 2012, Oyo State had 26 public primary and junior secondary schools for persons with disabilities and Osun State had 18. In Oyo and Osun States residential facilities and lunch are provided (Nkechi, 2013) ^[14]. Nkechi asserted that Delta State government is yet to fully implement the scheme, as the special education scheme across the state are either moribund with falling rooftops, waterlogged or inaccessible. The special schools located in Asaba, Warri, Ughelli and Agbor are usually overcrowded due to lack of classroom block. Despite the level of commitment demonstrated towards the education of persons with special needs in some states, there are enormous problems and much need to be done in order to accommodate and provide qualitative education to a large number of adults with special needs in the country. That is why there is need for support services to be established to render assistance to these groups of persons in the society. This is because the general services in academic institutions may not always meet the needs of disabled adults, who have different needs depending on their specific disabilities and may need access to specialist facilities (Stein, 2013) ^[18].

Support services, therefore, are systems or procedures that are purposefully created and effectively utilized by institutions to support and to facilitate learning (Molefi, 2009) ^[12]. According to Kaur (2016) ^[9] support services involves a cluster of facilities and activities that are provided to make the learning process easier and more interesting for learners. In otherwise, Support services are

supports and resources needed to promote learning processes, encouragement, materials, financial assistance, parental knowledge or other activities that will enable them mix with the society.

According to Neena and Anuradha (2009) ^[13], the various types of services for persons with physical challenges, include academic support, administrative support, community support, parental support and peer support.

Academic support is the most important support to ensure appropriate education for adults living with physical disabilities. It generally helps to foster the development of physically challenged adults' competencies, life skills and habits of academic excellence. Stein (2013) ^[18] highlighted that academic support consists of the following measures; provision of instructional materials for adults with special needs and providing specialized help to adults with special needs in the resource room. The author further pointed other measures as modifying/ adopting the curriculum to suit adults with special needs, improving the quality of teaching, adopting innovative teaching practices, providing remedial instructions to adults with special needs, establishing linkage with special schools and utilizing the expertise and resources of special schools. Stein further averred that it is important for instructors of physically challenged adults to adopt innovative practices like participatory learning, peer tutoring, cooperative learning, and team learning while facilitating the learning of physically challenged adults.

Furthermore, the objective of providing support service to adults according to Makoe (2012) ^[11] is to develop in every physically challenged adult a sense of responsibility for his or her own learning by focusing on individual learner's experiences, perspectives, background, interests, capabilities and needs. Oriogu, Odoaka and Okafor (2017) ^[17] postulated that the above objective according to Makoe has not been accomplished in Nigeria in general and Delta State in particular. The authors lamented that institutions in Nigeria fail to put into consideration different adults' needs of both able and physically challenged adults in Nigeria. Some of the identified academic support services lagging include feedback, conducive learning environment, assistive technology, learning materials, facilitator support, peer support and counseling services. It is upon this background that this study seeks to determine the academic support services for improving the education of physically challenged adults in Delta State.

Research Question

The following research question guided the study:

1. What are the academic support services for improving the education of physically challenged adults in Delta State?

Hypothesis

The following null hypothesis will be tested at 0.05 level of significance

1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female physically challenged adults on academic support services for improving their education.

Method

This study adopted descriptive survey research design. This study is carried out in Delta State. The population of this

study comprised of 126 physically challenged adults in 11 Special Education Centres in Delta State. There was no sampling since the size is considered manageable. A structured questionnaire was developed for the study by the researcher, titled “Questionnaire on Academic Support Services for Improving the Education of Adults Living with Disability” (QASSIEALD).

The instrument was validated by three experts. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained by administering 20 copies of the instrument to physically challenged adults in Special Education Centre in Oji River

in Enugu State which is not part of the study. Cronbach Alpha was used to determine the internal consistency of the instrument. The instrument yielded reliability co-efficient of 0.81. Arithmetic mean was used to analyze the data related to the research question while t-test was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question 1

What are the academic support services for improving the education of physically challenged adults in Delta State?

Table 1: Respondents’ Mean and Standard Deviation Scores on Academic Support Services for Improving the Education of Physically Challenged Adults

S/N	Items on academic support services for improving the education of physically challenged adults	Resp.	X	SD	Remarks
1	We are provided with e-learning technology (e.g. computers, multimedia, audio/visual equipment)	Male	2.03	1.13	Disagree
		Female	2.15	1.39	Disagree
2	We are provided with laboratory facilities for practical/demonstration classes	Male	2.48	0.85	Disagree
		Female	2.12	1.16	Disagree
3	We are provided with additional resource books in the libraries according to reading or research needs of adults living with disabilities	Male	2.47	0.69	Disagree
		Female	2.41	0.94	Disagree
4	We are provided with direct and immediate feedback strategies for learners with disabilities	Male	2.27	0.84	Disagree
		Female	2.25	1.27	Disagree
5	We are provided with assistance on how to operate computer-assisted packages	Male	2.47	0.89	Disagree
		Female	2.00	1.27	Disagree
6	We are provided with course content (curriculum) according to needs of adults living with disabilities	Male	3.43	0.99	Agree
		Female	3.28	1.17	Agree
7	We are provided with learning experiences (e.g., seminars, tutorials) in different programmes	Male	3.39	1.05	Agree
		Female	3.43	1.01	Agree
8	We are provided with resource materials such as story books, dictionaries, newspapers, journals, magazines, etc., for our reading pleasure.	Male	2.16	0.92	Disagree
		Female	2.25	0.98	Disagree
9	We are provided with teaching resources that respond to class requirements Braille, sign language interpreters, tape recorders	Male	3.43	0.98	Agree
		Female	3.31	1.06	Agree
	Cluster Mean	Male	2.41		Disagree
		Female	2.48		Disagree

Table 1 shows the item by item analysis of academic support services for improving the education of physically challenged adults. The result revealed that male and female respondents jointly disagreed on items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 8. The analysis also revealed that male and female respondents jointly agreed on items 6, 7 and 9. More so, the cluster mean of 2.41 and 2.48 for male and female physically challenged adult means that the respondents disagreed on academic support services for improving the education of physically challenged adults in Delta State. The standard deviation scores ranging from 0.69 – 1.13 (for male respondents) and 0.98 – 1.39 (for female respondents) means that the difference between the standard deviation scores were not much, therefore this shows that the items are homogenous.

Discussion of Findings

The findings in this study revealed that male and female physically challenged adults disagreed on academic support services for improving the education of physically challenged adults in Delta State. This means that in terms of academics, physically challenged adults hardly receive appropriate educational support services, such as provision of e-learning technology, laboratory facilities and resource materials. This finding supported the findings of Ibijola (2017) which stressed that the provision of students support services are inadequate both in the federal and state universities. The findings corroborated the National Universities Commission report of inadequacy of relevant

facilities and services for students in Nigerian universities. On the other hand, this finding disagreed with the finding of Junio-Sabio (2012) that students generally find all the vices provided (registration and admission services; library services; information and learning technology services; academic advising; student learning support services and teaching resources) by the College to be important. The difference between the findings of both studies could be the disparity between both respondents of both studies. It could be that the academic support given to physically challenged adults differ from that of able bodied students. Their different perception could be why both findings differ. Furthermore, the finding could imply that personal care and special needs of physically challenged adults are not made a priority by the Centre; also teaching is not fostered according to the curriculum needs of physically challenged adults in the school in order to boost their academic success.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Government should take measures to improve the education of physically challenged adults by providing them with flexible teaching methods, instructional materials, learning aids and resource facilities in the integrated settings.
2. Government should work together with NGOs to provide accommodation adapted for the needs of the

- learners, professional care staff and help from volunteers.
3. Adult educators require capacity development and regular trainings to update on their teaching skills, as well as in the art of andragogy.
 4. There is need for adequate funding of adult education programmes to enhance the literacy and vocational training needs of the physically challenged adults.

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