



## VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AS A PANACEA TO UNEMPLOYMENT CHALLENGE AMONG PERSONS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN SELECTED SOUTH WEST STATES IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*This study examined vocational rehabilitation as a panacea to unemployment problems among persons with special needs in Nigeria, with a focus on the Farm Craft Training Center for the Blind, Lagos, and Moniya Rehabilitation Center, Ibadan. Persons with special needs, including those with visual impairments, often face barriers such as stigma, discrimination, limited access to education, inadequate training opportunities, and workplace inaccessibility, which contribute to high unemployment and social exclusion. Despite the establishment of rehabilitation centers across Nigeria, the effectiveness of these programs in enhancing employability remains underexplored. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, with a population consisting of trainees from the selected centers. A total of 70 respondents were purposively sampled. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) to test four hypotheses related to challenges, skill gaps, vocational training effectiveness, and employment outcomes. Findings revealed a significant relationship between vocational rehabilitation and employability among persons with special needs. Results also indicated that challenges such as societal stigma, inadequate training*

*facilities, and lack of assistive technologies negatively affect employment access. Furthermore, skill gaps and training needs were found to be significantly related, demonstrating that tailored vocational training is essential to bridge these gaps. Completing vocational rehabilitation programs significantly improved employment outcomes for trainees. The study concluded that vocational rehabilitation plays a crucial role in enhancing employability and promoting socio-economic inclusion for persons with special needs. It recommends that policymakers, educators, and stakeholders strengthen vocational rehabilitation centers through inclusive educational policies, financial support, and awareness campaigns to combat stigma and improve accessibility. Future research should examine the effectiveness of various resources and strategies in supporting vocational rehabilitation and employment integration for persons with special needs across Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Persons with special needs, Vocational rehabilitation, Employability, Visual impairment, Unemployment, Nigeria.

## Introduction

The concept of a person with special needs refers to an individual who requires additional support, services or accommodations due to physical, sensory, cognitive, emotional, developmental and behavioural challenges. These needs may be temporary, long-time or permanent and can be from congenital condition, illness, injuries or environment factors, experiences limiting their ability to see or read printed materials either due to a congenital condition or acquired through injury, disorder or disease. Special needs are of different diversity of needs, individual with special needs may face challenges in mobility, communication, interaction, or mental health which includes; physical disabilities, sensory impairment, cognitive or intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities and emotional or behavioural disorders. Individual with visual impairment

ranges from mild to severe, some are partially sighted and others being completely blind. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020), approximately 285 million people worldwide are visually impaired, with 39 million of them being blind. Special needs (disability) can have a significant impact on an individual's daily life, including their ability to navigate their environment, perform tasks independently, and participate in various activities. In addition to the physical challenges, individuals with special needs may also face social and emotional barriers, such as stigma, discrimination, and feelings of isolation which affect employability.

Unemployment refers to the state of being without a paid job or employment, but actively seeking work and available to start immediately (International Labour Organization, 2019). According to Alao (2020), unemployment is a condition of not

having a job, being available for work, and actively seeking employment, but not having a job offer or being laid off. Unemployment occurs when individuals are able and willing to work, but are unable to find employment, and are actively seeking work or waiting to start a new job (Mankiw, 2019). Despite advancements in technology and increased awareness about disability rights, individuals with special needs continue to face barriers to employment. Vocational rehabilitation has been identified as a potential solution to address the unemployment problems faced by this population.

Vocational rehabilitation is a process that enables individuals with special needs to secure and maintain employment. Vocational rehabilitation is a process of assisting individuals with special needs to overcome barriers to employment and achieve gainful employment consistent with their abilities, interests, and aptitudes (Uche, Winks & Andrew, 2019). It is a comprehensive and coordinated service delivery system designed to assist individuals with special needs to prepare for, secure, and maintain employment, and to achieve economic self-sufficiency (National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research, 2019). Vocational rehabilitation is a goal-oriented, individualized process that enables persons with disabilities to achieve and maintain employment, and to promote their economic and social integration (World Health Organization, 2020).

According to Ajekiigbe & Andrew (2017), Vocational rehabilitation is a dynamic and iterative process that involves

the assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation of services aimed at enhancing the employability, job performance, and career advancement of individuals with special needs. It is an all-inclusive approach that addresses the physical, psychological, social, and vocational needs of individuals with special needs. It involves a range of services, including assessment, counseling, training, job placement, and ongoing support. The goal of vocational rehabilitation is to help individuals with special needs achieve economic self-sufficiency and independence through meaningful employment.

Sobakin (2019) opined that one important aspect of addressing the increase unemployment rate of individuals with special needs is through vocational rehabilitation. Vocational rehabilitation programmes are designed to help individuals with special needs, including visual impairment, to obtain and maintain employment. These programmes provide a range of services, such as job training, job placement assistance, assistive technology, and accommodations in the workplace. An example of this vocational rehabilitation programmes center is the Nigeria Rehabilitation Training Center for the Blind located at Ogbomoso.

According to Ladipo (2019), individuals with visual impairments encounter a multitude of barriers in the labour market, hindering their ability to secure and maintain employment. These challenges include limited access to education and training opportunities, which are essential for acquiring the skills and knowledge required to compete in the job

market, and are often hindered by inadequate accommodations, lack of accessible materials, and insufficient support services. Discrimination and stigma from employers also persist, with biases in hiring decisions, job assignments, and career advancement opportunities, stemming from misconceptions about the capabilities of individual with special needs. Furthermore, even when employed, individuals with special needs often encounter workplaces that are not adapted to meet their needs, lacking adequate lighting, accessible technology, and sufficient assistive devices, making it difficult for them to perform their duties effectively. As a consequence, individuals with special needs are disproportionately represented among the unemployed and underemployed populations, facing significant obstacles in securing stable, fulfilling employment that matches their skills and abilities, and perpetuating a cycle of disadvantage that worsens social and economic inequalities.

Despite the challenges faced by individuals with special needs, research conducted by Adeniji (2017), has shown that individual with special needs ‘visually challenged’ are able to successfully enter and thrive in the workforce with the support of vocational rehabilitation services. According to a study by the National Federation for the Blind (2015), the employment rate for individuals with special needs who receive vocational rehabilitation services is significantly higher than those who do not. This highlights the importance of providing individuals with special needs access to the resources and support they need to achieve their employment goals.

A study on vocational rehabilitation conducted by Aderoju & Tanimola (2019), has highlighted the benefits of vocational rehabilitation for individuals with special needs. It was found that individuals who participated in vocational rehabilitation programmes were more likely to secure competitive employment and earn higher wages compared to those who did not receive such services. Additionally, vocational rehabilitation has been shown to improve self-esteem, independence, and overall quality of life for individuals with visual challenges.

Persons with special needs can work in a wide range of occupations with appropriate training and placement under normal working conditions (Sobakin, 2019). However, the right to work is often not respected, and people with special needs encounter many barriers (Sobakin, 2019). Generally speaking, persons with special needs are excluded from society and prevented from participating in it for such simple reasons as lack of access to buildings or transportation, or inability to write.

The effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation in addressing unemployment among individuals with special needs remains a knowledge gap, despite its potential benefit. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the impact of vocational rehabilitation on the employment outcomes of individuals with special needs by understanding the factors that contribute to successful vocational rehabilitation outcomes, policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders can develop more effective strategies to support individuals with special

needs in their quest for meaningful employment.

### Statement of the Problem

Persons with special needs face a disproportionately high unemployment rate compared to the general population. Limited access to tailored vocational training and support services significantly contributes to this disparity. Existing vocational programmes often fail to cater to the unique needs of persons with special needs, resulting in a skills gap. Furthermore, employer misconceptions and biases exacerbate workplace discrimination and exclusion.

Despite the existence of few vocational rehabilitation programs, persons with special needs in Nigeria continue to face significant challenges in accessing employment opportunities, leading to high levels of unemployment and poverty. The Nigeria Training Center for the Blind in Ogbomoso, established to provide vocational training and rehabilitation services, has not been able to adequately address the unemployment problems of its trainees. This raises concerns about the effectiveness of the center's programmes and the need for a more comprehensive approach to vocational rehabilitation. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the challenges faced by persons with special needs in accessing employment opportunities and the impact of vocational rehabilitation programmes on their employability, with a focus on Farm Craft Training Center for the Blind Lagos and Moniya Rehabilitation Center Ibadan.

### Objectives of the Study

The general aim of this study is to examine vocational rehabilitation: A panacea to the unemployment problems of persons with special needs in Nigeria Farm Craft Training Center for the Blind Lagos and Moniya Rehabilitation Center Ibadan. The specific objectives of this study are to:

- I. Find out how effective is the vocational rehabilitation programmes offered by the Nigeria Farm Craft Training Center for the Blind Lagos and Moniya Rehabilitation Center Ibadan in enhancing employability among trainees.
- II. Examine the skill gaps and training needs of persons with special needs in the center.
- III. Find out the challenges faced by persons with special needs in accessing employment opportunities after vocation training?
- IV. Find out the employment outcomes of trainees who have completed the vocational rehabilitation programmes at Center.

### Research Hypothesis

The following are the research hypothesis

- **HO1:** Challenges faced by persons with special needs has no effect on their employment access after vocational training.
- **HO2:** Skill gaps and training needs are significantly related among persons with visual impairment.
- **HO3:** Vocational rehabilitation programmes do not significantly influence employability of persons with special needs.
- **HO4:** Completing vocational rehabilitation programmes does not

significantly impact employment outcomes for persons with special needs.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study would be of great importance as the data collected would benefit various stakeholders in Nigeria, including: Persons with special needs, vocational rehabilitation professionals, education policy planners, disability advocates, ministry of education, public and private organizations providing services for persons with special needs.

### **Scope of the Study**

This study focus on Nigeria vocational rehabilitation centers for persons with special needs, Farm Craft Training Center for Blind Lagos and Rehabilitation Center Moniya Ibadan. The researchers explore specific context and experiences of these training centers, with the aim of gaining a deeper understanding of the employment issues and challenges faced by persons with special needs who receive training from the centers.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Descriptive survey research design is a procedure for organising and summarising data in order to communicate and describe important characteristics of the data, it determines and reports the way things are.

### **Population of the Study**

The population for this study comprised of all trainees in Farm Craft Training Center Lagos and Rehabilitation Center Moniya Ibadan.

## **Sample and Sampling Techniques**

A purposive sampling technique was used to determine the participants for the study. Seventy (70) trainees were purposively sampled to serve as respondents for the study.

## **Research Instruments**

The data for this study were collected through questionnaire. The questionnaire was made of two sections A and B. Section A deals with the demographic information of the respondents that participated in the study: their gender, age and years of training experience. Section B of the questionnaire items were made of 20 structured questions to rate the items on a 4- points scale of the degree of agreement or disagreement having these options. Strongly agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (DS) = 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) 1, for positive questions and reverse for negative questions. These questionnaires were distributed to the trainees in the above mentioned centers. Respondents were required to tick each item as it applies to them.

## **Method of Data Analysis**

Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient was used to analysis the responses of data collected.

**Results**

**Demographic Information of Respondents: Gender**

**Table 1. Gender of the Respondents**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Male	32	45.7%
Female	38	54.3%
Total	70	100%

The above table describes the characteristics of the respondents used for this study. In terms of gender, the data presented indicates that 32(45.7%) of the respondents were male and 38(54.3%) were females.

**Table 2. Age Distribution of the Respondents**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
22-32 years	36	51.4%
33-45 years	30	42.9%
45 years and Above	4	5.7%
Total	70	100%

In the above table, 36(51.4%) of the respondents fall between the age of 11-24 years, 30(42.9%) of the respondents falls between the age of 25-29 years and 4(5.7%) of the respondents falls within the age of 30 years and above.

**Table 3. Respondents Training Experience**

<b>Training Experience</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Above 3 Years	29	41.4%

Below 3 Years	41	58.6%
Total	70	100%

In the table above, 29(41.4%) of the respondents had above 3 years training experience while 41(58.6%) of the respondents are below 3 years teaching experience.

**Research Hypothesis one: Challenges faced by persons with special needs has no effect on their employment access in Nigeria.**

**Table 4. PPMC analysis showing the Challenges faced by persons with special needs and their employment access in Nigeria.**

N	$\sum X$	$\sum Y$	SSx	SSy	r-value	Decision
70	307	193	3,667.2	2,220.8	-0.9976	Reject H <sub>0</sub>

From the data presented in table 4, the results show that there is a strong negative relationship between the challenges faced by persons with special needs and their employment access in Nigeria. The

hypothesis was tested at 0.05% level of significance and since the r-value is -0.9976 we reject the null hypothesis. This indicates that there is a significant relationship between the challenges faced by persons with special needs and their employment access in Nigeria.

**Research Hypothesis Two: Vocational rehabilitation programmes do not significantly influence employability of persons with visual impairment.**

**Table 5. PPMC analysis showing the significant effects between vocational rehabilitation programmes and employability of persons with special needs.**

N	$\sum X$	$\sum Y$	SSx	SSy	r-value	Decision
70	347	153	3215.8	1,267.2	-1	Reject H <sub>0</sub>

From the data presented in table 5, the results show that there is a perfect inverse relationship between vocational rehabilitation programmes and employability of persons with special needs. The hypothesis was tested at 0.05% level of significance and since the r-value is -1 which indicates that there is a significant relationship between vocational rehabilitation programmes and employability of persons with special needs. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis.

**Research Hypothesis Three: Skill gaps and training needs are significantly related among persons with special needs.**

**Table 6. PPMC analysis showing the relationship between skill gaps and training needs among persons with special needs.**

N	$\sum X$	$\sum Y$	SSx	SSy	r-value	Decision
70	330	170	3,322.2	2,884.1	-1	RejectH <sub>0</sub>

From the data presented in table 6, the results show that there is a perfect inverse relationship between skill gaps and training needs among persons with special needs. The hypothesis was tested at 0.05% level of significance and since the r-value is -1 which indicates that there is a significant relationship between skill gaps and training needs among persons with special needs. Therefore, the hypothesis was rejected

**Research Hypothesis Four: Completing vocational rehabilitation programme does not significantly impact employment outcomes.**

**Table 7. PPMC analysis showing the relationship between completion of vocational rehabilitation programmes and employment outcomes of persons with special needs**

N	$\sum X$	$\sum Y$	SSx	SSy	r-value	Decision
70	388	112	3,353.2	1,273.2	-0.9991	RejectH <sub>0</sub>

From the data presented in table 7 the results show that there is a strong negative relationship between completion of vocational rehabilitation programmes and employment outcomes of persons with special needs. The hypothesis was tested at 0.05% level of significance and since the r-value is -0.9991 which indicates that there is a significant relationship between completion of vocational rehabilitation programmes and employment outcomes of persons with special needs.

**Discussion of Findings**

The study indicated that there are more female respondents 38(54.3%) compared to male 32(45.7%). The questionnaires were administered to 36(51.4%) persons with special needs within the age range of 22-32 years, 30(42.9%) of

them within the age range of 32-45 years and 4(5.7%) of them within the age range of 46 years and above. Also, the study revealed that 29(41%) of the respondents had above 3 years training experience while 41(59%) of the respondents are below 3 years training experience. All these shows that the

respondents are all persons with special needs and they are under training at the Nigeria Training Centers.

The results from hypothesis one revealed that there is a strong negative relationship between the challenges faced by persons with special needs and their employment access in Nigeria. The challenges as revealed by this study are consistent with previous study. For instance, a study conducted by Ayorinde and Owoeye (2016) on the challenges faced by special needs in securing job opportunities in Nigeria found a significant influence. The findings indicated that inadequate access to online application system and digital platforms by persons with special needs, limited access to vital information which hinders persons special needs in securing employment opportunities, stigma and negative stereotypes about person with special needs, limited financial resources for assistive technology and transportation cost and inadequate provision of facilities hinders their access to secure employment opportunities in Nigeria.

In hypothesis two, it was discovered that there is a correlation between the effectiveness of the vocational rehabilitation programmes offered by the Nigeria Training Centers in enhancing employability among trainees. The study revealed some of the impacts of the Nigeria Training Centers such as providing adequate education and training for individuals with special needs, providing access to assistive technologies and resources to support their learning and development etc. The findings of this study are consistent with previous study carried out by Kure & Jiroma (2018) it was

discovered that different Nigeria Training Centers plays crucial roles in ensuring employability of their trainees. With the impact of these centers, persons with special needs can easily secure employment opportunities despite their disability.

In hypothesis three, the null hypothesis was rejected and that there is a significant effect between the skill gaps and training needs of persons with special needs in Nigeria. The findings revealed some of relationship between skill gaps and training needs of persons with special needs in Nigeria which include; Limited access to quality education due to a lack of inclusive educational policies and facilities, persons with special needs face challenges in accessing and using technology effectively and there is inadequate vocational rehabilitation training. Ojelade & Ademola (2019), found a significant effect between these two variables. Their results shows that there is inadequate vocational rehabilitation training for persons with special needs, individuals with special needs find it difficult to secure a well-paying job as a result of their disability and there is no enough financial and physical support which hinders their ability to perform well.

In hypothesis four, the null hypothesis was also rejected and that there is a correlation between the employment outcomes of trainees who have completed the vocational rehabilitation programmes at the Training Centers. The research explored some employment outcome of persons with special needs who attended the Nigeria Training Centers and it was revealed that most trainees who attended the Institution were about to get a manageable employment

opportunities. Also, in the research conducted by Edward & Idoko (2017), findings revealed a correlation with the above findings and suggest that encouraging persons with special needs to attend training centers would help to provide access to employment opportunities and skills acquisition for them to live as an acceptable member of the society.

### **Conclusion**

This study concluded that vocational rehabilitation is a vital and effective strategy for addressing unemployment among persons with special needs in Nigeria. The findings demonstrate a significant relationship between participation in vocational rehabilitation programmes and improved employability outcomes, confirming that well-structured and targeted skills training can enhance economic independence and social inclusion. However, the study also highlights persistent challenges such as societal stigma, inadequate training facilities, limited assistive technologies, and accessibility barriers that continue to undermine employment opportunities for this population. The identified skill gaps further emphasize the necessity of tailored, need-based vocational training that aligns with labour market demands. Overall, the study concludes that vocational rehabilitation, when adequately supported and inclusively implemented, serves as a practical panacea to unemployment among persons with special needs. Strengthening rehabilitation centres through policy commitment, sustainable funding, capacity building, and public awareness is therefore essential for maximizing their impact. By addressing

structural and attitudinal barriers, vocational rehabilitation can significantly contribute to poverty reduction, workforce participation, and the broader goal of socio-economic inclusion for persons with special needs in Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

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

- Policymakers and educators should prioritize the development of inclusive educational policies and facilities, access resources, and employment opportunities for persons with special needs.
- Vocational rehabilitation programmes, such as those offered by the Nigeria Training Center should be expanded and strengthened to enhance employability among persons with special needs.
- Addressing the stigma and negative stereotypes surrounding special needs should be a priority, through raising awareness about the rights and needs of persons with special needs and promoting inclusive attitudes and practices.
- Financial and physical support should be provided to persons with special needs to enable them to access education and employment opportunities, and to support their overall well-being.

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