

Accommodations in national examinations in Nigeria: Analysis of the experiences of candidates with disabilities

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Prof Paul M Ajuwon is a Nigerian with visual impairments settled in the USA. He is a lecturer at the Missouri State University. He is a prolific writer and has many researched articles published in learned journals to his credit.

In the work, the author tries to projects the plight faced by individuals with disabilities in Nigeria in their efforts to scale through public examinations in the Nigerian school system. He started by drawing a comparison to the American system of education which makes for accommodation of all persons (disabled/non disabled) equal opportunities to participate and benefit from the school. He pointed out that test accommodations are frequently given to students with disabilities in order to reduce barriers that may hinder the true assessment/measurement of their knowledge, skills and abilities. Hence, test accommodations are considered as adjustments or modifications to the standard testing conditions which alleviates the impact of the applicant's functional limitation on examination process without fundamentally altering the nature of the examination; imposing an undue administrative or fiscal burden on the Board; comprising the security, validity or reliability of the examination; or providing an unfair advantage to the applicant with the disability. (<http://www.nybarexam.org/Docs/ADA%20Application%20.pdf>).

The author holds that in the United States, a number of mainstream testing services provide various types of testing accommodations for candidates with disabilities. The Educational Testing Services (ETS) divides their testing accommodation into computer-based testing and paper-based testing. Accommodations for computer-based testing include: providing extended testing time, providing additional rest breaks, providing a reader, providing an individual to record the student's answers, providing a sign language interpreter (for spoken directions only), allowing the students to select the background and foreground colours of the computer and providing alternate testing formats including: audio recording, Braille and large prints. ETS's

accommodations for paper-based testing include: providing extended testing time, providing additional rest breaks, providing a reader, providing a sign language interpreter (for spoken directions only), providing the test/answer sheet in large print, providing an audio recording that may be accompanied with a large print figure supplement and/ or a raised-line figure supplement. The American College Testing (ACT) is a college entrance examination which also provides testing accommodations for students with disabilities. ACT divides their testing accommodation into three types. These include: Centre testing No 1. This provides accommodations but the students with disabilities must abide with the Standard Time National Testing. Centre Testing No 2. is classified as Extended Time National Testing. The third category is classified as Special Testing accommodation for students with disabilities. Similar to ETS is SAT which is another college entrance that provides accommodations. Other accommodations are divided into four groups namely: 1. Presentation, 2. Responding, 3. Timing/scheduling and 4. Settings.

In the Nigerian situation of the educational system according to the author, examinations to various post secondary institutions are organized by three main bodies namely: The West African Examination Council (WAEC), The National Examination Council (NECO) and the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB). In these types of examinations, the author pointed out that candidates with disabilities are lumped in together with the non disabled students into writing the examinations without proper/adequate accommodations made for them which hitherto affect their performance. Candidates with disabilities on the other hand often encounter barriers in participating in National examinations characterized by:

- Invigilators and supervisors ignored candidates with special needs when assistance is sought.
- Invigilators are unable to respond to candidates inquiries pertaining to poor transcribed questions in Braille.
- There is perceived negative attitudes of the invigilators towards candidates with disabilities.
- Invigilators' unfamiliarity with sign language, thus hindering communication with deaf candidates.
- Inability to present examination materials in preferred format.
- Extended time not offered to the candidates with disabilities to complete examinations.
- Deaf/hard of hearing candidates are made to sit for/write oral English which has not been taught them.
- Delay in the release of the results of the candidates with disabilities by the examination bodies.

In a bid to for stall the discrepancies trailing the poor conduct of examinations in the country for candidates with disabilities, a number of measures have been articulated by the author to help curb the problem. These include:

- Training of the invigilators/supervisors on disability and specific needs of candidates with disabilities in the examinations.
- Providing noise free environments during examinations especially for candidates who have hearing difficulties.
- Ensuring that examination questions are properly transcribed into Braille.
- Allowing breaks during examination because of arm fatigue particularly for candidates with physical or health limitations.
- Carrying out extensive awareness programme among stakeholders on the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities in the conduct of public examinations in the country.

The author rests his case by submitting that the current initiatives in the education sector must focus on best practices in accommodating candidates with disabilities in national examinations. So as a practical first step, the agencies shouldered with the responsibilities of the conduct of the examinations must formulate a coherent policy that will guarantee accessibility in examinations for all candidates with disabilities. Furthermore, there is need to carefully scrutinize the process of constructing examination items to promote inclusive assessment of all candidates to buttress the tenets upheld in the country's National policy on education (2004) that education in Nigeria is 'an instrument par excellence' for effecting national development and that every Nigerian child shall have the Right to equal educational opportunities irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities, each according to his/her abilities.

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