

Barriers to employment for persons with disabilities as correlate of economic contribution to national development: the case of Owerri, Nigeria

(scientific paper)

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Abstract: *This study investigated barriers to employment for persons with disabilities as correlate of economic contribution to national development: The case of Owerri, Nigeria. A survey of fifty (56) persons with disabilities of which 52 were applicants and four were already in the workforce in Owerri, Nigeria constituted the sample for the study. Three null hypotheses guided the study. A twenty (20) item questionnaire with a modified four point Likert scale and reliability coefficient of 0.79 was used to canvass responses of the purposively sampled participants on barriers to employment for persons with disabilities as correlate of economic contribution to national development. The data collected were statistically analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis. The findings revealed that social stigma, competitive Nigeria labour market and employers' undue focus on the disability statistically relate with economic contribution to national development. Recommendations were made among others that there should be enactment of laws which will favour employment of persons with disabilities in public and organized private sectors. In this regard, a specific percentage or quota should be allotted to the persons with disabilities in compliance to UNESCO mandate. Similar laws are in operation in some developed countries; Nigeria should adopt such a law to give to these persons a pride of place in the society.*

Key words: *employment, economic contribution, national development and disabilities*

1 Introduction

Persons with disabilities have long suffered undue economic disadvantages by reason of their disabilities which have sidelined them from social and economic participation resulting to decline in income opportunities. The social, political, economic, health and educational status of persons with disabilities has greatly been trailing far behind those without disabilities because they are yet to be integrated into all domains of the society as citizens particularly in a developing country like Nigeria. The United Nation Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities defined disability as an evolving concept, and that it results from the interaction between persons with impairments, attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder full and effective participation in the society on an equal basis with others without disabilities (UNESCO, 2006).

Department for Work and Pensions (2006) stated that during the past 20 years, national governments and advocates of persons with disabilities have attempted with increasing vigor to integrate disabled people into the broad social and economic life of society. These attempts have included efforts to both raise awareness of the contributions and skills of these people and reduce barriers to participation in public activities. An important component of this is ensuring that persons with disabilities have access to the same opportunities to seek and remain in employment as non-disabled people.

International Labour Organization (ILO) (2011) encouraged the integration of disabled people into the labour force. This reflects a growing sense that employment can both benefit the individual and reduce future government expenditures on disabilities grants. Government and taxpayers can expect to benefit from reduced expenditures on public assistance as low-income disabled people enter employment, as well as from increased tax revenue from new earnings. Department for Work and Pensions (2006) also noted that employers form a checker to determine whether or not these societal expectations are transformed into reality for disabled people.

Getting to work and maintaining the work is regarded as one of the key areas where people with disabilities have felt disadvantaged. The issue of employment has attracted considerable attention by both the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and the Productivity Commission. Employment plays a critical role in providing persons with disabilities with a sense of community both in workplace and social networks. Harnessing all human resources and potentials in the development process produced increased economic viability, productivity and efficiency in all domains of economic growth. Accordingly, discrimination that erects barriers to the full and equal involvement of people with disabilities in the work force can have widespread and profound negative effect on the economy considering Nigeria Vision 2020 (Adenosin & Tochukwu, 2012).

It is against this background that this research is conceived to focus on most common barriers to works for persons with disabilities in Owerri, such as social stigma, competitive labour market and employers' undue focus on "the disability" rather than the potentials of persons with disabilities. Also the linear relationship of the above with economic contribution of persons with disabilities to national development shall be investigated upon.

2 Social stigma

Social stigma is extreme and undue disapproval of persons with disabilities through the vehicle of negative attitudes and perception towards them in the workplaces. Social stigma is a serious issue with a critical and long lasting impact on persons who are being discriminated against and treated unfairly. Persons with disabilities are frequently not considered potential members of the workforce in Nigeria and this has greatly declined the productivity and efficiency of the economy. Perception, fear, myth and prejudice continue to limit understanding and acceptance of disability in workplaces in Nigeria. Myths abound that persons with disabilities repel potential customers and place a stigma on the name of the organization, and thus accommodating them in the workplace is derogatory with the impending low productivity of the organization.

Chukwuemake (2014) in his empirical studies reported that unfair treatment and discrimination against persons with disabilities at work took a variety of forms, such as inappropriate job placement, social distance, working hours, assessment of work performance or appraisal, underutilization of skills, underpayment. Contrary to these myths, many companies have found that persons with disabilities demonstrate commitment and devotion to work increasing the overall productivity and human capacity. The real obstacle lies with employers and employees without disabilities. Many are still hesitant to take on employees with disabilities because they believe they may create problems in the workplace due to their socio-psychological anomalies. There is also the assumption that this type of appointment will incur cost as the workplace has to be retrofitted with disability-friendly designs to accommodate them. It is common to observe colleagues' lack of understanding and flexibility in their dealing with coworkers with disabilities. In some cases, workers with disabilities have been shunned and harassed by potential employers by reason of their disabilities (Handicapped International 2006; State Service Commission 2002). Social stigma has greatly hampered persons with disabilities from contributing their quota to national development through equal access to work which is a major economic activity.

3 Competitive Nigeria labour market

There is no denying the fact that there is evident shrinkage of Nigeria labour market where it is an issue of survival of the fittest; and those with disabilities are consistently disadvantaged. The realities of Nigeria labour market obviously reveal that supply of skilled personnel is greater demand to the detriment of job seekers with disabilities. Simply put, the labour market is saturated. Labidho and Ken (2009) revealed their findings that the employers of labour in Nigeria have now evolved a maze of criteria in which bodily features of employees is upheld in recent times to squeeze out those with physical deviations. Consequently, job seekers with good resume are grossly denied access to work opportunities due to their disabilities, making it unrealizable for them to act as contributing members of the society. The authors further stated that this issue has sidelined great potentials from contributing adequately to the development of the national in a variety of facets of Nigeria economy. Some that are employed are given wrong job placements despite their skills and knowledge; and wage gap characterize the employment of persons with disabilities in Nigeria. Low levels of employment and high rates of unemployment and inactivity reflect the huge labour market disadvantage of people with disability. The difficult labour market integration of people with disability poses a bigger threat to Nigeria's realization of vision 2020 as well as global competitiveness in various domains. The reverse can contribute to raising the productive capacity of the economy and reduce the costs associated with disability benefit programmes. Borino and Hindo (2015) stated that the recent deep recession and its associated and still ongoing jobs crisis are likely to worsen labour market opportunities for people with disability. Research-based analysis shows that persons with disability bear the brunt of economic recession more than people without disability. Most worryingly, the education gap between people with and without disability has widened the gap which further intensifies the shrinkage in employment prospect for persons with disabilities in Nigeria labour market system (Ghiji and Jirusalam, 2013).

4 Employers' undue focus on the disability

It is not uncommon to see employers of labour focused unduly on "the disability" rather than looking at the "abilities and potentials" of persons with disabilities and the contribution of these employees to the financial strength and sustenance of their organizations. Deska and Ressor, (2009) in a study revealed that employers tend to have this erroneous assumption that employees with disabilities are likely under-perform in most professional areas of service delivery. This group of people is seen as those that lack ability in everything despite the area of disability. The report further stated that employers give priority to providing humanitarian services individually or

as an association at regular interval rather than give a person with disabilities work because of a prejudicial attitude. Employers stereotype persons with disabilities as indolent, unambitious, inconsistent, costly to employ and sickness-prone employees. While few employers of labour include a certain number of disabled people in employment, the types and wages of the jobs typically are not on par with those offered to non-disabled people. In some workplaces employees with disabilities have been segregated from colleagues and customers to avoid that “stigma” on the organization (Murray & Heron 1999; Smith 2004). Evidently, it is seen that:

- Interviewers’ lack of expectations, and focus on a person’s impairment rather than on their skills and abilities (Equal Employment Opportunity Trust 2005)
- Public perceptions focusing on impairments rather than ability (International Labour Office 2002).

5 Economic cost of excluding persons with disability from workforce

The global commitment to equalizing social and economic opportunities for persons with disabilities is both for humanitarian and economic purposes. From the economic perspective, it is expected to increase the human capital of persons with disabilities to contribute to self and the development of the society as well as enable them to reduce their dependence on income transfers and other forms of public support. This economic expectation reflects the understanding that disability is a development issue and if this category is sidelined from development process it reduces human capital for national development (Jiru & Lorra, 2011).

The World Bank (2010) considers that leaving people with disabilities outside the economy translates into a forgone GDP of about 5–7 per cent. People with disabilities often have to rely on their families or on charity for survival. Furthermore, women with disabilities are generally worse off than men with disabilities; they have less access to jobs and earn half the income of male peers in similar jobs. Participation in economic life is a necessity. People with disabilities need to earn a living and contribute to the support of their families, which can only be achieved through unhindered access to work and full appreciation of their potentials to promote economic growth of any nation. Bari and Kril (2007) stated that economic activity is also one factor that promotes self-actualization and self-esteem of persons with disabilities thereby giving them a sense of inclusion. Work offers people with disabilities the opportunity to be recognized as contributing members of their communities. When society offers people with disabilities a variety of options, such as opportunities to work fulltime, sporadically, part-time and/or part-year, as well as volunteer placements, the result is the empowerment of those who have traditionally been barred from a chance to function at their individual and societal best (Itre & Galuo, 2001).

Metts (2004) stated that disability tends to reduce economic output by reducing or eliminating the economic contributions of certain members of society, particularly people with disabilities. The amount by which economic output is reduced in this way constitutes the net economic cost of disability. Thus, the make-up for this economic lost is the ability of the society to fully integrate persons with disabilities into the workforce as means of harnessing all human capital for national development. A disability-inclusive approach to development seeks to include people with disability in the development process by recognizing their potential, valuing and respecting their contributions and perspectives, honouring their dignity, and effectively responding to their needs (AusAID 2008).

There is an increasing awareness that people with disabilities can gain both socially and economically from full participation in national development through inclusion in the workforce. That is true not only because of the obvious link between economic security and employment, but also because of the understandable connection between well-being, self-esteem and meaningful employment. Hugh (2005) stated that the best way to fight benefit dependence and exclusion among people with disability is to promote their re-integration into employment. This helps to increase any nation's human capital thereby raise the prospect of higher longer-term economic output.

The lost productivity can result from insufficient accumulation of human capital (underinvestment in human capital), from a lack of employment, or from underemployment (World Bank 2010). Some studies have sought to estimate the indirect costs to people with disabilities and their households. A study from 1986 found that one disabled child who does not receive appropriate rehabilitation and inclusion may place a burden on the community up to 6 times more (European Commission, 2010).

Several policy documents make the case that a disability-inclusive approach may have broader economic benefits for society as a whole. Adopting a disability-inclusive approach may have benefits for society as a whole: actively including people with disability and creating more accessible and inclusive communities will not only benefit them, it results in more successful and sustainable development for all. Disability-inclusive development significantly contributes to achieving the SDGs targets in that increasing employment levels among disabled people increases both the amount of goods and services produced in the economy, and the demand for goods and services (Ausaid, 2008).

Statement of the problems

Despite the efforts of the international development agencies such as World Bank, United Nations and World Health Organization to promulgate policies and legislation that aim at preventing discrimination in areas such as employment, and with the increasing recognition of the economic benefits of employing people with disabilities, the employment rate in Owerri has remained low compared to the rate for

people without a disabilities. This denial of opportunities for economic, social and human development breeds hunger and poverty, and its immediate adverse effect is low socioeconomic status of the family, dependency and eventual family neglect, and by extension, constitutes economic loss to the nation. Secondly, research and experience increasingly abound that the rate of participation of persons with disabilities in workforce correlates with their level of economic contribution to national development thereby predicting the Domestic Gross Product.

Also it has been experienced that the economic output as well as the development in Owerri has grossly been affected due to deliberate sidelining of persons with disabilities from workforce. In Owerri, economic activities such employment has excluded human capital with disabilities resulting to the stalling of economic growth. It is against this background that the research is keen finding out the relationship between barriers to employment for persons with disabilities and their economic contribution to national development. The problem is what relationship exists between social stigma in workplaces, Nigeria competitive labour market as well as employers' undue focus on the disability; and economic contribution of persons with disabilities to national development?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate barriers to employment for persons with disabilities as correlate of economic contribution to national development: The case of Owerri, Nigeria. Specifically, it aimed at finding the relationship between:

1. Social stigma against persons with disabilities in employment and economic contribution to national development
2. Nigeria competitive labour market and economic contribution to national development
3. Employers' undue focus on the disability and economic contribution to national development

Research Hypothesis

To direct the study, a null hypothesis was formulated that:

1. There is no significant correlation between social stigma against persons with disabilities in employment and economic contribution to national development
2. There is no significant correlation between Nigeria competitive labour market and economic contribution to national development; and
3. There is no significant correlation between employers' undue focus on the disability and economic contribution to national development

Material and methods

The study adopted a survey research design. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 56 (fifty six) persons with disabilities in Owerri of which 52 were applicants and four were gainfully employed. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire of twenty items with a modified 4 point Likert scale. It was used to elicit responses from respondents on the correlation between barriers to employment for persons with disabilities and economic contribution to national development. The instrument was validated and has reliability coefficient of 0.80 obtained through Cronbach Alpha method of determining reliability. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis was used to analyze the data obtained from 56 respondents.

Presentation of Result

Research hypothesis One: There is no statistically significant correlation between social stigma against persons with disabilities in employment and economic contribution to national development. The hypothesis testing and its analysis are done in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the Relationship between social stigma against persons with disabilities in employment and economic contribution to national development (N=56).

Variables	Mean	SD	ΣX^2 ΣY^2	ΣXY	Sig	R
Social stigma against persons with disabilities in employment	11.32	4.65	911.21			
Economic contribution to national development	13.41	5.21	1571.41	388.18	0.005	0.61

$P < 0.05$ Degree of Freedom (df) = 54

The Table 1 above revealed that social stigma against persons with disabilities in employment having a mean of 11.32 and Standard Deviation of 4.65 and economic contribution to national development having also a mean of 13.41 and Standard Deviation of 5.21 produced an $r = 0.61$ is significant at $p < 0.05$ and at df of 54 indicates that social stigma against persons with disabilities in employment is significantly related to economic contribution to national development.

Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. This shows that the more social stigma against persons with disabilities in employment prevails the lower is their economic

contribution to national development. Conversely, when this barrier to employment is removed, these individuals tend to participate actively in the development of the national economy. Conclusively, less social stigma against persons with disabilities in employment promotes higher the economic output of any nation; hence all the human capital is harnessed to boost the economy in all domains.

Research hypothesis Two: There is no statistically significant correlation between Nigeria competitive labour market and economic contribution to national development. The hypothesis testing and its analysis are done in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the Relationship between Nigeria competitive labour market and economic contribution to national development (N = 56)

Variables	Mean	SD	ΣX^2 ΣY^2	ΣXY	Sig	R
Nigeria competitive labour market	13.14	5.23	1693.01			
economic contribution to national development	13.41	5.21	1571.41	1110.10	0.000	0.54

$P < 0.05$ Degree of Freedom (df) = 54

In Table 2 above Nigeria competitive labour market has a mean of 13.14 and Standard Deviation 5.23 while economic contribution to national development has a mean of 13.41 and standard deviation of 5.21. The correlation coefficient obtained from Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Nigeria competitive labour market and economic contribution to national development is $r = 0.54$ at df of 54 is significant at $p < 0.05$. The result shows that Nigeria competitive labour market has a positive significant relationship with economic contribution to national development. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. This shows that the shrinkage in Nigeria labour market has greatly reduced the contribution of persons with disabilities to national development; hence, persons with disabilities are greatly disadvantaged and fully bear the brunt of the congestion in labour market system.

Research hypothesis Three: There is no statistically significant correlation between employers' undue focus on the disability and economic contribution to national development. The hypothesis testing and its analysis are done in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the Relationship between employers' undue focus on the disabilities and economic contribution to national development (N = 56)

Variables	Mean	SD	ΣX^2 ΣY^2	ΣXY	Sig	R
employers' undue focus on the disability	11.11	4.30	891.90			
economic contribution to national development	13.41	5.21	1571.41	579.02	0.002	0.59

$P < 0.05$ Degree of Freedom (df) = 54

The Table 3 revealed that employers' undue focus on the disability has a mean of 11.11 and Standard Deviation of 4.30 and economic contribution to national development has mean of 13.41 and Standard Deviation of 5.21 and is significant at $p < 0.05$ and produced a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.59$ at df of 54. This indicates that employers' undue focus on the disability has significant relationship with economic contribution to national development. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. This shows that employers' undue focus on the disability without looking out for the potentials of persons with disabilities tend to reduce Gross Domestic Product of the nation; hence the wealth of potentials of these people is not tapped into leading to the current economic recession.

Discussion

The first hypothesis stated that there is no statistically significant correlation between social stigma against persons with disabilities in employment and economic contribution to national development. The findings of this hypothesis revealed that social stigma against persons with disabilities in employment have a statistical relationship with economic contribution to national development. The result is in agreement with the findings of Chukwuemake (2014) which affirmed that unfair treatment and discrimination against persons with disabilities at work took a variety of forms, such as inappropriate job placement, social distance, working hours, assessment of work performance or appraisal, underutilization of skills, underpayment. Several qualified applicants with better job credentials are denied the opportunity to contribute positively to economic development of the society because they have disability which

may not significantly limit their functioning in such capacity. Nigeria as a third world country trailing in science and technological advancement as well as leadership force ought to harness all human capital with diverse endowments in the development process. Leaving a category out of development plan by reason of disability is great loss the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as well as economic output.

Similarly, in support of the above findings, Handicapped International (2006) and State Service Commission (2002) affirmed that in some cases, workers with disabilities have been shunned and harassed by potential employers by reason of their disabilities. Many persons with disabilities are deprived of the opportunity to rescue the current recession in Nigeria economy which will ultimately defeat her quest for achievement of Vision 2020. Any economy that wants to boom in all facets of development, an inclusive approach to economic development is employed where nobody is left out in the development process but all initiatives are harnessed and valued for the purpose of ensuring massive economic growth. In the same vein, World Bank (2011) agreed that the lost productivity can result from insufficient accumulation of human capital (underinvestment in human capital), from a lack of employment, or from underemployment.

The second hypothesis of this study stated that there is no statistically significant correlation between Nigeria competitive labour market and economic contribution to national development. The findings revealed that there is a statistical relationship between Nigeria competitive labour market and economic contribution to national development. These findings are line with the work of Labidho and Ken (2009) supported that the employers of labour in Nigeria have now evolved a maze of biased criteria in which physical features have is used squeeze out those with disabilities from economic mainstream of the society. Consequently, job seekers with good resume are grossly denied access to work opportunities due to their disabilities, making it unrealizable for them to act as contributing members of the society. The authors further stated that this issue has sidelined great potentials from contributing adequately to the development of the national in a variety of facets of Nigeria economy. Nigeria annually graduates millions of people from universities into labour market, providing more people for limited job opportunities. People with disabilities are greatly disadvantaged in this regard addition to the fact that Nigeria is not yet a disability-minded nation. When people without disabilities are competitively in a consistent struggle for limited jobs what then is the hope of the minority population with disabilities. This makes their economic importance questionable by the general society because they are seen as burden to the government.

In corroboration, Hindo (2015) stated that the recent deep recession and its associated and still ongoing jobs crisis are likely to worsen labour market opportunities for people with disability. Due to the saturation in labour market system, persons with disabilities face more employment crises as some are retrench and replaced with

more able-bodied persons without disabilities. This makes labour market system unfavourable and tend to waste the effort of the educated and propping many questions on the relevance of their certificates gotten from schools.

Conclusively, the third hypothesis states that there is no significant correlation between employers' undue focus on the disability and economic contribution to national development. The result of the findings showed that statistical relationship between employers' undue focus on the disability and economic contribution to national development. These findings agree with Deska and Ressor (2009), which supported that employers tend to have this erroneous assumption that employees with disabilities are likely under-perform in most professional areas of service delivery. The popular saying that "there is ability in disability" remains a factual truth in economic contribution of persons with disabilities. A disability affects ability in one area of functioning and not the whole physical and psychological functioning of a person. Such people may hold greater initiative and inventive ideas on the measures of propelling the economy of Nigeria to achieving vision 2020 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Mobilizing all human capital is critical to booming Nigeria economy to global recognition.

Conclusion

One of the critical ways in which citizens of a country contribute to economic development is through active participation in workforce. Thus, any group of people sidelined from workforce would constitute economic danger to the country thereby reducing its economic output. Nigeria is far from emerging as one of the 20 largest economies in the world and established itself as the giant of Africa due to one of these major reasons of excluding some human capital from actively partaking in economic development process of the country. Persons with disabilities in Nigeria face gross disadvantage in employment which is a setback to any propitious nation. A persistent exclusion of persons with disabilities from labor force constitutes a disadvantage to these people as well as the economy of Nigeria; hence, their inclusion in workforce would bring about economic marginal productivity particularly in this period of economic recession.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, recommendations are hereby made that:

- There should be enactment of laws which will favour employment of persons with disabilities in public and organized private sectors. In this regard, a specific percentage or quota should be allotted to the persons with disabilities. Similar laws are in operation in some developed countries; Nigeria should adopt such a law to give to these persons a pride of place in the society.

- The government should be committed to complying with the UNESCO's 5% quota on employment for person with disabilities to ensure an all encompassing policy that will favor not only employment of the persons with disabilities but also a conducive environment that will enhance mobility, accessibility and productivity. This policy should enforce compliance to universal design in all public and private buildings as well as conveniences. In addition, there should be walkways, special car parks, working materials, devices that will enhance their productivity in line with global best practices.
- Retributive sanctions should be meted out to any employer who deprive them access to work in their organizations by reason of disabilities. Such laws prohibit any employment discrimination against persons with disabilities.
- In order to promote inclusion and equality in employment, disability stakeholders should provide regular sensitization and awareness campaign on the need to promoting the rights of persons with disabilities and eliminating negative prejudices against persons with disabilities.
- Public and private buildings built with noncompliance to the principle of universal designs should retrofit necessary adapted and accommodating features to promote access and mobility of persons with disabilities to avoid firetrap.

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