

VOCATIONAL SKILLS AND SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD AMONG PERSONS LIVING WITH DISABILITIES IN AN ERA OF ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTIES

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Abstract

This study investigated the relevance of vocational skills to persons with disabilities under economic uncertainties for sustainable livelihood in Edo State. Three research questions guided the study and one hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design with a population of 525. This was made up of 400 registered members of the Joint National Association of Persons With Disabilities (JONAPWD), Edo State chapter and 125 managers of registered trade/vocational centres in Edo State. The sample size for the study was 80 respondents, made up of 62 persons with disabilities and 18 managers of registered trade/vocational centres in Edo State. The sample size was obtained through purposive sampling technique. A structured questionnaire with 18 items arranged in clusters was used as instrument for data collection. The instrument was validated by three experts from the Department of Vocational and Technical Education, University of Benin, Benin City. Cronbach Alpha statistical formula was used to test the reliability of the instrument and it yielded a coefficient of 0.85. The findings of the study revealed that, with vocational skills such as shoe-making, leather works, vulcanizing, painting, amongst others, persons with disabilities are less affected negatively under economic uncertainties because if they acquire the skills they can fend for themselves. Based on the findings, it was recommended, amongst others, that persons with disabilities should acquire vocational skills to enable them get sustainable livelihood in Edo State.

Keywords: Skills, Disabilities, Economic Uncertainties and Sustainable Livelihood

Introduction

Vocational skills refers to an occupation or job which an individual gets involved in leading to recognition as an expert through experience, which can be acquired through formal and Non-formal education. In the formal setting, skills can be acquired through schools such as the Technical Colleges, Polytechnics and Universities while in non-formal setting skills are acquired through means such as Vocational Trade Centres and Apprenticeship Scheme (Osuyi & Owenvbiugie, 2015). The use of vocational skills as a veritable tool for job, wealth creation and a means of survival and the preservation of the human race dates back to the

beginning of human society. It was traditional and often practised within the family cycle (Akpan, Usoro & Ibiritam, 2020). Akpan et al stressed further that it was common for children to learn their parents' skills such as weaving, sculpturing, blacksmithing, carving, farming, fishing, cattle rearing, hair plaiting, dress making, bead making, leather-work, pottery, basket and mat weaving, and many more. Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) stated that Nigeria's national goals includes 'the building of a united, strong and self-reliant nation, a great and dynamic economy and a land full of bright opportunities for all citizen', leading to self-reliance and sustainable development. Skills acquisition provides a workforce that is empowered with necessary knowledge and qualifications that could lead to gainful employment and competitiveness in the dynamic global market. In Nigeria, the framework for the acquisition of vocational skills is embedded in the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) policy. Vocational education is intended to equip persons for industrial or commercial occupations. It may be obtained either formally in trade schools, technical secondary schools, or in on-the-job training programs or, more informally, by picking up the necessary skills (Nanjwan, Eke & Plang, 2019).

Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) in the National Policy on Education explains that the expression 'Technical and Vocational Education and Training' is used to refer to those aspects of educational 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. It further stipulates that TVET shall cover Technical Colleges, Vocational Enterprise Institutions (VEIs) and National Vocational Qualifications Framework (NVQF).

The importance of vocational skills acquisition in the present day Nigerian society cannot be overemphasized, as the nation grapples with many challenges that could make living difficult. One of such challenge is economic uncertainties. Economic uncertainties refers to a situation in which future economic environment is difficult to predict. One major event that brought economic uncertainty globally, and to Nigeria in particular, is the covid-19 pandemic (Osuyi & Uwaifo, 2023). The measures taken to contain it, such as lock-down, social and physical distancing, amongst others, caused significant economic uncertainties. However, the study conducted by Osuyi and Uwaifo added that while some Small and Medium-scale Enterprises (SMEs) suffered economically during covid-19, activities of motor vehicle mechanics and generator repairers thrived because people needed their services even during lock-down.

Other sources of economic uncertainties in Nigeria in recent times includes the re-design of the naira in 2023 which lead to cash crunch; the total removal of subsidy on petrol by the Federal Government, whereby prices of petroleum product is determined by market forces; the floating of Nigerian currency (naira) exchange rate in the Foreign Exchange (FOREX) market; and frequent cases of civil un-rest, such as hash tag #ENDSARS protest of 2020 and #ENDBADGOVERNANCE protests of 2024. These protests snow balled into looting, with grocery, grains and beverage businesses worse hit. All of which led to rapid price fluctuations and a geometric increase in the cost of goods and services. At such times those that are most vulnerable are children, women and those living with disabilities. (Osuyi & Obanewa, 2019)

Persons living with disabilities refer to persons with physical impairment to sensory and locomotion, intellectual impairment and mental health condition. Those living with disabilities constitute a significant demographic group in the Nigerian population. On August 2, Worldometer (2024) elaboration of United Nations data puts Nigeria's current population at 229,567,310. Meanwhile, Lalu (2023) stated that a recent World Health Organization (WHO) report estimates that about 35,100,000 persons have disabilities in Nigeria. That

implies that over fifteen per cent (approximately 15.3%) of Nigeria's population lives with one form of disability or the other.

Persons with disabilities have needs as much as others. They depend on family members, friends and others for their daily livelihood. But in recent times their chances of survival have become more challenging because of economic hardship. For example, during the aforementioned period of covid-19 pandemic lock down, persons with disabilities were reported to have suffered neglect, starvation, anxiety, anger, sadness, lack of medical care and poverty (Thompson, Chuba-Uzo, Rohwerder, shaw & Wickenden, 2021). Furthermore, persons with disabilities could experience downturn in educational, health and social protection (Lang, Kett, Groce & Trani, 2009). However, persons with disabilities having vocational skills might not experience these impact of economic uncertainties, as they are more likely able to fend for themselves and even support their families financially unlike their counterparts without who are without vocational skills.

Statement of the Problem

Period of economic uncertainties are very difficult times for people to cope with. Such times are characterized with unpredictable economic indices which make earning a means of livelihood becoming more difficult. Worse hit during such periods of economic uncertainties are persons living with disabilities. This is due to the fact that they cannot engage in economic activities like the able bodied persons can do. They often depend on receiving a piece meal from the fortune earned by their family members, relatives and friends, who are already overburdened with high cost of living for survival. Hence, their continued support for those persons with disabilities might not be guaranteed or sustainable.

The researchers are therefore worried that persons living with disabilities will continue to suffer neglect and economic hardship if they are not empowered. Therefore, if persons living with disability acquire vocational skills such as shoe-making, leather works, vulcanizing, painting, hair-plaiting, barbing, cake baking, generator and motor vehicle maintenance, fabrics weaving, wood works, electronics repair, electrical installations, plumbing works, garment making, ornament making, pottery amongst others, they will be better positioned to provide means of sustainable livelihood for themselves, especially in era of economic uncertainties.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to determine the usefulness of vocational skills for sustainable livelihood among persons living with disabilities in an era of economic uncertainties. Specifically, the study determined the:

1. impact of economic uncertainty on persons with disabilities.
2. types of vocational skills that can be acquired by persons with disabilities for sustainable livelihood; and
3. relevance of vocational skills for sustainable livelihood to persons with disabilities in an era of economic uncertainties .

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the impacts of economic uncertainties on persons with disabilities?
2. What are the types of vocational skills that could be acquired by persons with disabilities for sustainable livelihood?
3. What is the relevance of vocational skills for sustainable livelihood to persons with disabilities in an era of economic uncertainties?

Hypothesis

One null hypothesis was tested at a significant level of 0,05

H₁: There is no significant difference between the mean responses of persons with disabilities and managers of vocational trade centres on the relevance of vocational skills in an era of economic uncertainties for sustainable livelihood.

Method

The descriptive survey research design was used to carry out the study on the relevance of vocational skills to persons with disabilities under economic uncertainties for sustainable livelihood in Edo State. Descriptive survey is a research design that uses a representative sample of the population to describe the opinions, beliefs, attitude of the people about a particular phenomenon. The result obtained from the sample could be used to generalise for the entire population. This design was found to be suitable for this study because a representative sample of persons living with disabilities and managers of trade/vocational centres opinion were used to generalise for the entire persons with disabilities in Edo State. Sustainable livelihood was the dependent variable, while vocational skill was the independent variable.

The population of the study consisted 525 persons, of which 400 were persons living with disabilities composed of five disabled groups, namely, the blind, the physically disabled, the deaf, those with spinal cord injuries and leprosy victims. Whereas the remaining 125 persons were managers of technical colleges and vocational skill acquisition centres registered with Edo State Government. The population was made available to the researchers by the Office of Edo State Chairperson of Joint National Association of Persons With Disabilities and the Board of Technical and Vocational Education, Edo State. The sample size of the study was 80 persons, representing 62 persons living with disabilities and 18 managers of Government technical colleges and registered vocational skill centres. Stratified random sampling technique was used to determine the sample size for persons with disabilities with each stratum representing each disabled group. Additionally, purposive sampling was used to determine the sample size of managers of technical colleges and registered vocational skill centres as technical colleges and vocational skill acquisition centres having resources for training persons living with disabilities were used for the study. Table 1 showed the sampled persons with disabilities while Table 2 showed the sampled managers of technical colleges and vocational skill acquisition centres in Edo State.

Table 1: Sample Size of Persons With Disabilities

SN	Disabled Group	PWDs
1.	The Blind	14
2.	The Physically Disabled	12
3.	The Deaf	13
4.	Those with Spinal Cord Injuries	11
5.	Leprosy Victims	12
Total		60

Table 2: Sample Size of the Study

SN	Location	Vocational Trade Centres	Managers
1.	Benin City	Benin Technical College.	8
2.	Ehor	Ehor Technical College	2
3.	Irrua	Irrua Technical College	2
4.	Afuze	Afuze Technical College	1
5.	Igarra	Igarra Technical College	1

6.	Igarra	Niger Delta Edo Vocational Centre	1
7.	Igueben	Vocational Skills Acquisition Centre	1
8.	Uromi	Edo Jobs Centre	1
9.	Auchi	Oseni Elamah ICT Institute	1
Total			18

One instrument titled “Persons With Disabilities and Managers of Vocational Trade Centres Questionnaire (PWDMVTCQ) was used to collect data from persons living with disabilities and managers of trade/vocational centres. The instrument was made up of two sections, A and B. Section A elicited respondents bio data while section B contained 17 item statements arranged in clusters according to the number of research questions. The response categories are Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) rated 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The instrument was validated by three experts in the department of Vocational and Technical Education, Faculty of Education, University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State.

In order to ascertain the stability of the instrument, Cronbach alpha coefficient formula was used. The instrument was administered to 20 respondents once, comprising 10 persons living with disabilities and 10 managers of trade/vocational centres in Delta State. The test yielded an overall coefficient of 0.85. The questionnaire was subsequently administered to persons living with disabilities and managers of trade/vocational centres in Edo State. The researcher was assisted by 10 research assistants. The research assistants administered the instrument to the respondents and retrieved same.

The data collected were analysed with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The research questions were answered with Mean ($\bar{X}$) and Standard Deviations (SD) statistics while Z-test statistics was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The decision rule was based on the criterion mean of 2.50. Therefore, any calculated mean value equal or greater than 2.50 was regarded as agreed, whereas mean value less than 2.50 was considered as disagreed. Furthermore, a p-value equal or less than 0.05 alpha, obtained from the Z-test, means that the hypothesis was rejected whereas p-value greater than 0.05 alpha means that the hypothesis was retained.

Presentation of Results

Research Question One

What are the impacts of economic uncertainties on persons living with disabilities?

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation showing the Impact of Economic Uncertainties on Persons with Disabilities

S/N	Item	N	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	SD	Remarks
1	Fear, anxiety, emotional destabilization and increased possibility of depression	80	2.83	.961	Agreed
2	Lack of basic needs and poverty	80	2.93	.930	Agreed
3	Neglect and starvation	80	2.88	.951	Agreed
4	Income inequality and uncertainty	80	2.89	.940	Agreed
5	Educational, health and social protection downturn.	80	2.90	.933	Agreed
Cluster Mean			2.87	0.10	Agreed

Note: SD (Standard Deviation), N (Sample Size)

Table 3 showed the impact of economic uncertainties on persons living with disabilities. The respondents rated items one to five as Agree, with a mean rating ranging from 2.83 to 2.93 while the standard deviation also ranges from .930 to .961. The cluster mean showed a mean of 2.87. With these results, the above mean scores shows that all the respondents agreed that fear, anxiety, emotional destabilization, vulnerability to depression, lack of basic needs, poverty, neglect and starvation, amongst others, are the impact of economic uncertainties on persons with disabilities.

Research Question Two

What type of vocational skills can be acquired by persons with disabilities for sustainable livelihood?

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation Showing Types of Vocational Skills that could be Acquired by Persons with Disabilities

S/N	Item	N	Mean (X)	SD	Remarks
6	Mat, basket and fabrics weaving	80	2.56	1.112	Agreed
7	Hair plaiting, barbing, make-up artisan	80	2.63	1.129	Agreed
8	Motor vehicle and generator maintenance, carpentry, electronics repair, electrical and plumbing works	80	2.69	1.001	Agreed
9	Garment making(tailoring and fashion design), bead/jewellery making, pottery	80	2.74	.928	Agreed
10	Catering services such as cake baking	80	2.65	1.137	Agreed
11	Leather works such as shoe and bags making	80	2.80	.916	Agreed
Cluster Mean			2.68	0.07	Agreed

Note: SD (Standard Deviation), N (Sample Size)

Table 4 reveals the types of vocational skills that can be acquired by persons with disabilities. The respondents rated items six to eleven as Agree with a mean rating ranging from 2.56 to 2.80. The standard deviation ranges from .916 to 1.180. The cluster mean indicated a mean of 2.68. The above mean scores shows that the respondents agreed that the skills listed are the types of vocational skills that can be acquire by persons with disabilities in Edo State.

Research Question Three

What is the relevance of vocational skills for sustainable livelihood to persons with disabilities in an era of economic uncertainties?.

Table 5: Mean and standard deviation showing the relevance of vocational skills for sustainable livelihood to persons with disabilities in an era of economic uncertainties?

S/N	Item	N	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	SD	Remarks
12	Reduction in crime rate and poverty.	80	2.86	.725	Agreed
13	Self reliance and National development	80	2.84	.920	Agreed
14	increased self dependence esteem	80	2.85	.863	Agreed
15	Provision of sustainable livelihood	80	2.91	.830	Agreed
16	Increased employability and appropriately paid work	80	2.90	.851	Agreed
17	Improved standard of living and creation equality in the society.	80	2.88	.933	Agreed
18	Improvement in mental health and general well-being	80	2.83	.953	Agreed
Cluster Mean			2.87	0.07	Agreed

Note: SD (Standard Deviation), N (Sample Size)

Table 5 depicts the relevance of vocational skills to persons with disabilities in an era of economic uncertainties for sustainable livelihood. The respondents' rated items twelve to eighteen as Agree with a mean rating ranging from 2.83 to 2.91 while the standard deviation also ranges from .725 to .953. The cluster mean disclosed a mean of 2.87. The above mean score shows that all the respondents agreed that vocational skills for persons with disabilities in an era of economic uncertainties is relevant because it leads to reduction in crime rate and poverty, increases self - reliance, and employability, it improves standard of living and mental health and provides the means of sustainable livelihood.

Hypotheses One

There is no significant difference between the mean responses of persons with disabilities and managers of vocational centres on the relevance of vocational skills in an era of economic uncertainties for sustainable livelihood.

Table 6: Z-test analysis showing mean difference between the mean responses of persons with disabilities and managers of vocational trade centres on the relevance of vocational skills in an era of economic uncertainties for sustainable livelihood.

Respondents	N	Mean($\bar{X}$)	SD	df	z-value	p-value	Decision
Persons with Disabilities	62	2.65	0.44	78	1.090	.055	H ₀ Retained.
Managers of Vocational Trade Centres	18	2.68	0.30				

Value Significant at 0.05 level (Reject Hypothesis) SD: Standard Deviation. df: degree of freedom

The result in Table 6 reveals the mean score of the mean responses of persons with disabilities and managers of vocational centres on the relevance of vocational skills in an era of economic uncertainties for sustainable livelihood. Persons with disabilities had a mean of 2.65 and managers of vocational centres had a mean of 2.68 while their corresponding standard deviations were 0.44 and 0.30 respectively. The z-value of 1.090, testing at df of 78

and probability value of 0.05, the null hypothesis was accepted since the p-value is greater than alpha value. In other words, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference between the mean responses of persons living with disabilities and managers of technical colleges and vocational skill acquisition centres of the relevance of vocational skills to persons living with disabilities in an era of economic uncertainty for sustainable livelihood is retained.

Discussion of Findings

Research question one findings indicated that the impact of economic uncertainties on persons with disabilities are emotional destabilization, increased possibility of depression, fear, anxiety, neglect and starvation and downturn in education, health and social protection. This finding is supported by Thompson et al (2021) whose study revealed that persons with disabilities suffered neglect, starvation, anxiety, anger, sadness, lack of medical care and poverty during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, Lang et al (2009) identified educational, health and social protection downturn as some of the effect of economic uncertainties on persons with disabilities.

The result of research question two showed that type of vocational skills can be acquired by persons with disabilities for sustainable livelihood are Motor vehicle and generator maintenance, carpentry, electronics repair, electrical and plumbing works, Garment making(tailoring and fashion design), bead/jewelry making, pottery, cake baking, shoe making and bag making This finding agrees with the views of Akpan et al (2020) who identified vocational skills to include mat, basket and fabrics weaving. Furthermore, the findings also aligns with the study of Osuyi and Uwaifo (2023) which revealed that the activities of motor vehicle mechanics and generator repairers thrived under period of economic uncertainties, such as the covid-19 pandemic.

The finding in research question three indicated that reduction in crime rate and poverty, Self- reliance and National development, increased self- dependence and esteem, Provision of sustainable livelihood, increased employability and appropriately paid work, improved standard of living and creation of equality in the society and improvement in mental health and general well-being are relevance of vocational skills to persons with disabilities in an era of economic uncertainties for sustainable livelihood. This finding supports that of Nanjwan et al (2019) who identified the importance of vocational skills for persons with special needs to include attainment of higher levels of skills proficiency, improved mental abilities, increased employment opportunities, improved standard of living and creation of societal equality.

The findings of hypothesis one revealed that there is no significant difference between the mean score of persons with disabilities and managers of vocational centres on the relevance of vocational skills under economic uncertainties for sustainable livelihood. The null hypothesis is, therefore, retained.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that skills acquisition is relevant to persons with disabilities in an era of economic uncertainties for sustainable livelihood.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made.

1. To counter the negative impact of economic uncertainties on persons with disabilities, parents, guidance, Government at all levels and the Organized Private Sector should encourage and support persons with disabilities to acquire skills as part of their social corporate responsibilities.

2. The Federal Government of Nigeria and State Governments (sub-nationals) should urgently consider inclusiveness of persons living with disabilities in vocational skills acquisition. This means that they should provide well equipped skill acquisition centres that can cater for the training needs of persons with disabilities in particular.
3. Owing to the overwhelming relevance of vocational skills, persons with disabilities should, as a matter of urgency and priority, acquire vocational skills that will serve as a means of livelihood for them, especially under economic uncertainties.

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