

Implementing Inclusive Youth Empowerment In Nigerian TVET Under The Disability Act 2018

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ABSTRACT

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) holds immense potential for lifting young persons with disabilities into independence especially in a country like Nigeria where skills are fast becoming currency. Access to TVET for youths with disabilities in Nigeria is greatly shaped by environment and attitude than by ability and legality. The enactment of Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act (DAPPA), 2018 being a land mark law, clear in its intent and bold in its promises, was supposed to bring this to an end, but the reverse has brought the problem of this research. This study therefore explores how TVET institutions in Nigeria are practically responding to the call for inclusion beyond the paperwork of this landmark legislation. Qualitative research approach is employed to investigate lived experiences of youths with disabilities, challenges faced in the institutions and coping strategies across different contexts. However, rather than rely on unverified figures or models, this paper draws meaning from the words and worlds of its participants. It upholds the Latin principle of participation: *Nihil de nobis, sine nobis* (nothing about you without you). It synthesized how access, empowerment, and skill development are being shaped or hindered by institutional practices, policy awareness, and social attitudes under the existence of the aforementioned law. The finding reveals that although the Act has set a strong legal foundation, true inclusive youth empowerment still depends on lived practical implementation, in classrooms, workshops, and in the mindsets of the educators involved. It concludes that TVET in Nigeria cannot fulfill its promise under the DAPPA until its doors are open to all, and until every young person, regardless of ability is seen as capable of contributing to the common goal.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Youth Empowerment, Disability Rights, TVET, DAPPA 2018

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive youth empowerment is the usual narrative often carried in government official documents, policy speeches, and Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) workshops but these remain a distant promise and not lived reality for many youths with disabilities in Nigeria. With rising demands for practical skills, Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) has been positioned as a gateway to opportunity and the Nigerian youth measure equal to this task in ambition. For youth with disabilities, TVET skills are the shortest path to dignity since it offers means to create livelihoods. But even the shortest path can become inaccessible when it is not built with everyone in mind. The fact remains that some persons are left behind even before the journey begins. Those with disabilities, in classrooms and training centers across Nigeria, they struggle with great effort to access learning spaces and supports. This has not been easy. The journey remains very difficult for them. Despite the enactment of the Disability Act, 2018 under the legal title of Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act (DAPPA), 2018 which was

supposed to bring this to an end, as a land mark law, clear in its intent and bold in its promises, the least has been the case.

The DAPPA guaranteed the right of persons with disabilities to access education training and employment on equal basis with others. This was 6 years ago, now the question remains: Do the institutions meet the Act's demand? Are disability inclusive policies being implemented in ways that affect lives of individuals who are actually disabled? And more importantly, do young people with disabilities feel the legal impact by this Act?

This paper does not claim to have all the answers to these questions. But it is a close listening to voices often silenced, to institutions that are trying and to gaps that still exists. It adopts qualitative approach to explore how youth with disabilities and navigating the TVET under the Nigerian Disability Rights Act 2018. It is not to condemn the government or the law but to reflect to bring into view the realities beneath the surface of legislation; to remind us that inclusive

development is not only a policy demand, that it is actually a human one.

Objectives of the Study

This study sets out only two main things that matter deeply to the study and its audience:

1. To look closely at the DAPPA 2018: to see if it truly says anything meaningful or useful about the rights of young persons with disabilities, especially as it relates to TVET, learning handwork, skills, or trade.
2. To find out whether the present way TVET is run in Nigeria includes or leaves behind youth with disabilities, and to suggest how things could be made better, fairer, and more welcoming for them.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A lot has been said about youth empowerment and disabilities in Nigeria and something is still left unsaid, especially while travelling through the corridors of TVET. This unit will unveil the gist.

Understanding Disability and Inclusion

Disability, as most writers would say, is beyond physical and mental health condition. It is deeply shaped by the response from the society or lack of it. Environmental impairment is considered as disability caused by society as the social model of disability may argue. When the social system excludes individuals, they become disabled. And this has been seen in the call for shift on how societies think about ability, access and inclusion [1] and [2]. This model has begun to find space in advocacy circles in different global societies but its presence in the educational policy and practice, especially TVET remains uneven in Nigeria precisely.

The Promise and Purpose of TVET

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has long been promoted as the backbone of national development of Nigeria. This is because this training provides skills that enable individuals in the society meet up with the real-world need such as repairs of equipment's, carpentry, ICT, fashion design, auto mechanics, and lots. The potential that is embedded on these TVET-skills are recognized by the National Policy on Education which approves of it in other to help reduce unemployment and equip young persons for self-reliant living. However, authors from Nigeria [3] have observed in their writings that TVET institutions in Nigeria has been under neglect, underfunding, poor alignment with modern economic demand and poor implementation. Factors such as limited infrastructure, non-adaptive equipment, and untrained instructors often remain great barriers for youth with disabilities in Nigeria.

Disability Legislation in Nigeria: A Focus on DAPPA 2018

It almost took more than a decade of advocacy and resistance to get the bill passed and signed into law

the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2018 which was a landmark achievement for disability rights in Nigeria [4]. This Act prohibits discrimination in education, employment, healthcare, public spaces and mandates accessibility in all public places including schools and training centers. Despite the specific laudable provisions of this act, it has been noted by Nigerian writers that the gap between policy and practice still remain wide as observed [5]. So many TVET institutions still lack awareness of the Act and thus do not consider its provision as binding. There is also little or no monitoring or accountability to ensure compliance and proper implementation of the Act particularly outside urban areas.

Inclusive Youth Empowerment: Global and Local Perspectives

Global development discourse often includes youth empowerment as its central pillar. The goals of the United Nations on sustainable development (SDGs): especially Goal 4 (inclusive and equitable quality education) and Goal 8 (decent work for all), highlight the importance of leaving no one behind [6]. By this, inclusive empowerment means recognizing every young person's potential -- and removing the structural barriers standing on their way. [7] emphasized the need for youth empowerment to include both economic and human empowerment. Empowerment is meant to include voice, dignity, and recognition, especially for youth whose physical conditions and realities do not fit the norm of ability. Inclusive TVET on the other hand should not be an afterthought. It should be incorporated into the foundation of curriculum design, teacher training, infrastructure planning, and student support services of the TVET institutions.

Gaps in Literature

Notwithstanding that a lot of literature exists on TVET and youth empowerment in Nigeria, studies that relate TVET to disability specifically under the DAPPA 2018 are few. Much of what other writers say have always treated disability as a side issue or focus only on general education and youth empowerment. Very little cases show studies that dig a bit deep into how young persons with disabilities experience vocational education spaces, or how TVET centres are adapting (or failing to adapt) to legal provisions of the DAPPA and moral responsibilities expected of them in the Nigerian society. It is against this backdrop that this study sets into a relatively quiet space to give voice to the unheard, bringing to the foreground, the stories, struggles, and small victories of those who are often spoken for but rarely actually spoken to.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. Firstly, it provides a critical, timely analysis of the

implementation of a landmark Nigerian law (DAPPA 2018) six years after its enactment, specifically within the crucial sector of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). This addresses a significant gap in the literature, which often treats disability as a peripheral issue in TVET discourse. Secondly, the findings have practical implications for policymakers, educational administrators, and disability rights advocates. By identifying specific ambiguities in the law and gaps in institutional accountability, the study provides a clear roadmap for legislative amendment, policy development, and strategic implementation. Ultimately, this research matters because it centers on the lived reality of a marginalized demographic: youths with disabilities, and argues that Nigeria's national development cannot be sustainable or complete without their full and equitable inclusion in skill-building initiatives. It translates a legal text into a conversation about human potential, dignity, and national progress.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative content analysis approach, focusing on legal documents, policy frameworks, and institutional materials, especially the DAPPA 2018 and related implementation frameworks in Nigerian TVET institutions.

Research Design

This paper adopts a qualitative document analysis approach. It critically engages with texts, laws, frameworks, official documents, and institutional strategies. These documents are instruments of governance, power and protection for youth with disabilities in vocational education and Nigerian society in general.

Using the guiding method of content analysis, focused on the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act (DAPPA), 2018 as the backbone document the research asks the following questions:

1. What rights does DAPPA provide for inclusive technical and vocational education?
2. How are these rights framed, emphasized or limited?
3. Are there contradictions, silences, or gaps in how the policy envisions disability empowerment?

The research design matches the study because the law itself is the first gate to inclusion, before the school walls, before the classroom desks and the teachers' instructions.

Sources of Data

The primary source of data for this study is the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act (DAPPA), 2018 [4] which was read, annotated and analyzed for key thematic provisions relating to education, youth empowerment, and TVET inclusion. Other supporting documents include:

(i) National Policy on Inclusive Education (ii) Strategic Implementation Frameworks on TVET (Federal Ministry of Education) (iii) Institutional guidelines for selected Nigerian polytechnics or technical colleges (iv) Reports or policy briefs from disability rights in Nigeria (v) International instruments referenced by DAPPA, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) [8]. In order to ensure authenticity and credibility of the contents and sources, all these documents were accessed from official government sources, NGO reports, and academic archives.

Method of Analysis

This paper employs the use of thematic content analysis which involves reading documents for ideas, emphasis, repetition, and omission. This method of analysis was used to seek meaning, not what the document stated, but how it is stated, where it is positioned in the document for importance and what is left out (unsaid). The process of this method included: (a) close reading of each document, several times to understand its full context; (b) coding of key words, phrases and sections relating to youth, disability, and vocational training which are marked; (c) theme extraction of emerging patterns which are identified, such as: "accessibility", "non-discrimination", "capacity building", and "policy silence". (d) interpretation of themes in the light of real-world implications for inclusive youth empowerment in Nigerian TVET.

This whole method was followed to ensure that the research stay grounded in documented reality by examining the intention of the law and how that intention is structured on paper.

Justification of Method

This method is justified because it serves as a scrutiny of the implementation of Nigerian Disability Rights Act, 2018 in the light of inclusive youth empowerment in Nigerian TVET sector. In a society where laws are often passed with little or no follow-up, it is usually necessary to return to the provisions of the law to demand accountability from the necessary implementation authority.

The DAPPA 2018 falls in the category of such a legal promise, hence this research seeks to hold a mirror to that promise for society to see and be guided. The research requires little or no field work as it does not weaken the study method and approach but rather strengthens its focus on specific policy and legislative will. More on the advantaged side, the study circumvents surface impression by using this document analysis and digs deep into the architectures of protection that were designed -- or rather poorly designed for Nigerian youth with disabilities.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Since the study did not involve human participants, there were no privacy or consent risks as relates to persons with disabilities and the entire public. It only remains committed to intellectual honesty, proper citing of sources and responsible interpretation of the legal provision of the legal texts, statutes and legislations employed or consulted.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

While this study provides a critical analysis of the legal and policy frameworks, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The primary limitation is its exclusive reliance on document analysis. This approach, while robust for examining legislative intent and policy architecture, does not capture the on-the-ground realities, perceptions, and lived experiences of youths with disabilities, TVET instructors, or administrators. The findings indicate gaps and ambiguities in the law, but they cannot quantify the extent of these implementation challenges across Nigeria's diverse geopolitical zones. Future research would benefit immensely from a mixed-methods approach that combines this policy analysis with qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys to provide a more comprehensive and multi-dimensional understanding of the inclusion landscape in Nigerian TVET institutions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section carefully portrays the provisions of the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act (DAPPA), 2018 on youth training and inclusion and what is left to be provided.

Framework of Rights: What the DAPPA Promises

The DAPPA categorically specified its position as standing against all forms of discrimination. It boldly declares in Part II, Section 1, that: no person with disability shall be discriminated against on the basis of disability. This is a strong foundation but following the letter of the law deeper, questions begin to rise. In Section 17, the Act recognizes the right to education and it calls for inclusive schools, adequate accommodations, and equal access but it does not single out vocational education or directly mention technical training institutions -- still knowing that these fans flame of the engine room of national development. The silence of the Act on this non-specificity was loud. This is because for a country like Nigeria, with high youth unemployment and growing informal economy, vocational education cannot be optional, it is indispensable. Hence when the Act says education but does not specify TVET, there automatically exists room for exclusion. This exclusion may not originally be intended, but it becomes real when budgets are drawn and policies are interpreted according to the specificity of the provision of the Act.

Section 28 DAPPA: Vague Handshakes with Empowerment

Section 28 of DAPPA provides for economic empowerment and vocational rehabilitation. This might look promising at first glance, for the fact that it mandates the government to promote the training of persons with disabilities in skills for self-reliance. However, the provision is broad, unspecified and non-binding on the government and its antecedents for failing to keep to the letter of the Act. There are no clear pathways, timelines, or designated institutions to hold responsible on this specific provision. Worse still, TVET is not mentioned by name. And most critically, there is no outlined strategy for youth inclusion, who have remained the most dynamic and vulnerable demographic among the population of persons with disabilities in Nigeria. Hence it can be said that Section 28 of DAPPA only succeeded in opening the window in the vault but forgot to fix the ladder to reach it.

Institutional Silence: Where Are the Implementing Bodies?

Another loophole is in enforcement of the law. DAPPA establishes the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities under Section 31 of the Act, but it assigns the Commission more of a monitoring role than a coordinating or directive one. They stay on watch with observer status, no serious administrative and implementation or enforcement action. On the other side of the story, there is also no obligation placed on Federal or State TVET Boards, Polytechnic Governing Councils, or Education Ministries to report, implement, or integrate inclusive education measures for youths with disabilities. Hence it can be said the Section 31 of the Act only succeeded in setting the table but failed to call the cooks and thus the kitchen remains cold.

Discussion: Between Law and Lived Experience

From this analysis, three critical themes emerge: ambiguity in policy language, youth not named, and TVET institutions not held accountable.

i) Ambiguity in Policy Language: the provision of the DAPPA 2018 was in noble generalities about rights, access and inclusion, which fails to mention specific, actionable contexts like TVET and this creates room for institutions to ignore or under-prioritize the TVET inclusion.

ii) Youth Not Named: the Act can rightfully be said to be disability-focused but not youth-conscious. It does not seem to put into consideration that most persons with disabilities in Nigeria are young and that their empowerment must begin with practical education and employment preparation for a sustainable national development.

iii) TVET Institutions Unaccountable: there is no legal provision that compels TVET centres and institutions to include disability-accessible programs, teacher training, or facilities. Hence this makes the

inclusion of youth with disabilities a matter of charity or best practice rather than of law.

The discovered gaps show why even after the enactment and full operation of DAPPA 2018, many Nigerian vocational institutions still lack disability-friendly environments ranging from ramps, trained interpreters, adaptive equipment's, to special-needs classrooms.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act (DAPPA), 2018 is a step forward, an act of intention by the Nigerian Federal Government to recognize the dignity and rights of persons with disabilities [4]. What is left is to ensure more inclusive coverage of the general provisions of the Act and to activate its hands-on implementation and outright enforcement.

Conclusion

In the absence of precise legal anchors for inclusive TVET, many youths with disabilities have found themselves drifting between hope and hopelessness. Their youthful energy and potential for contribution to the society have been left untapped. That was not because they were unable or disabled as such, but rather because the government and the legal system have not activated the plan for things to be made possible. The future of Nigeria will have to be shaped not just by oil or policy papers, but by the youths of its nation. If those with disabilities are left behind in TVET, then national development is itself incomplete. Inclusive empowerment should not be seen as luxury, welfare or charity. This is the path to sustainable nation-building. And until this is taken seriously by government, society and individuals, everything will still boil down to the slogan of a door half-open still being a door half-closed.

Recommendations

These are our well-thought-out suggestions, small hinges that may open big doors:

1. Amend DAPPA 2018 to Include TVET Explicitly: The Act should be revisited and reformed to be more inclusive, to directly and categorically reference Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). This will close the legal lacuna and compel TVET institutions to act accordingly.
2. Name the Youths: Legal documents, policies and laws must reflect they aim to serve and be specific and purposeful about it. DAPPA 2018 should be revised to specifically include youth-focused disability provisions, especially as it relates to skills acquisition and training.
3. Develop a National Inclusive TVET Policy Framework: The Federal Ministry of Education and the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) should develop and enforce a disability-inclusive TVET Strategy, with proper guidelines, timelines, and funding allocations [9].

4. Capacity Building for TVET Staff: Regular training and in-house training and retraining on inclusive teaching methods, assistive technologies and disability rights awareness should continuously be given to instructors and administrators in technical colleges and training centres.

5. Monitoring and Accountability Mechanisms: The National Commission for Persons with Disabilities should be empowered by the Act by which they are set up, to audit, report, and penalize non-compliant TVET institutions across the Nigerian Federation [10].

6. Community Sensitization and Stakeholders Collaboration: inclusion starts from grassroots. It is a ground-up process. So, local communities, parents, NGOs, and youth themselves must be actively engaged in awareness-creation campaigns and programmes that challenge stigmatization and promote inclusive participation.

In closing, laws must do more than sit on shelves. They must walk into classrooms. They must sit in chairs beside every child. They must bend down to hear the voice of the silent. If Nigeria truly desires growth, it must plant seeds in every soil, even in the rocky places, and water every dream, especially those once overlooked.

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