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IMPROVING ACCESS OF PERSONS WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENT TO EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH COLLABORATION OF STAKEHOLDERS IN OYO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined access to employment opportunities by individuals with hearing impairment through stakeholders' collaboration. Descriptive survey research design was adopted to carry out the study. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 87 co-workers and government officials (stakeholders) in Oyo State, Nigeria. Three research questions were answered. A self designed questionnaire-Access to Employment by Persons with Hearing Impairment Questionnaire (AEPHIQ) ($r=0.77$) was used to collect data. The data collected were analysed, using descriptive statistics of frequency count and percentage. The study revealed that the level of awareness of stakeholders about disability and employment was very low, the attitude of stakeholders towards employees with hearing impairment was negative and there was no collaboration of stakeholders about the employment of employees with hearing impairment. There should be increased level of awareness of stakeholders about disability and employment, societal attitude towards employees with hearing impairment should be positive and there should be collaboration among stakeholders concerning the employment of employees with hearing impairment. These will improve access to employment of individuals with hearing impairment.

Key words: *employment, hearing impairment, discrimination, stakeholders*

Introduction

Employment is one of the means through which an individual interacts with his or her social and economic environment. In other words, it helps his or her social and economic status. It plays a major role in the well-being and quality of life of people. Moreso, it is good for physical and mental well-being.

Obani (2003) described employment as being engaged in some form of activity, work or job for which some financial reward

is expected and accepted. This, according to him, could happen in different settings, such as, the civil and public services, industries, personal enterprises or self-employment and at different levels to-managerial, supervisory, skilled, semi-skilled and menial labour level.

Furthermore, Obani (2003) reported that meaningful employment has both social as well as economic implications and benefits. In the light of this, social and economic status of people is a function of their access

to the labour market and other economic empowerment programmes.

Paid work, according to Jongblood and Critchon (1990), is an important part of our lives. It provides an opportunity to earn an income and to have social and political status established. Without opportunity of working, integration into society can be limited. Consequently, unemployment or poor wages may restrict social and leisure pursuits. Again, worklessness is associated with poverty and poor physical and health problems in an individual.

In developing countries like Nigeria, the rate of unemployment is at alarming rate. This has increased the level of poverty among the citizens. Unfortunately, individuals with special needs are more affected by this situation. This is because they are considered as not being employable due to their disabilities. These individuals include those with hearing impairment, visual impairment, physical disabilities and other forms of disabilities. There are many environmental and attitudinal barriers preventing them from gaining employment in our contemporary society. For instance, Obani (2003) pointed out that for a person to be considered for employment, especially, in this era of economic recession, high technology and highly specialized skills, such a person will have to be positively perceived being employable.

The individuals with hearing impairment are often seen by employers and sometimes their co-workers, as people who are not employable or as people whose levels of productivity are always very low when compared with their counterparts who are without disabilities. Many reasons have been advanced for the discrimination that the people with hearing impairment experience with respect to gaining access to employment opportunities, but, the greatest

of these reasons, is negative attitude they experience from the people around them in their workplace and the members of the society. In the light of this, Right to work (2004) emphasized that the biggest barrier to gaining and advancing in employment is not the physical environment, but the negative attitudes often displayed by employers and co-workers towards people with disabilities.

Until recently in most parts of the world, persons with disabilities are not equally treated with their counterparts who are without disabilities. In the light of this, Mapuranga and Phillipa, (2014) claimed that in many countries, persons with disabilities, including those with hearing impairment, were not given attention to work, even in the United States of America, prior to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. They equally reported that employment outcomes for PWDs continue to lag behind owing to attitude held by employers and co-workers. PWDs face restricted access to employment. They are often disregarded and considered as 'second class citizens' or inadequate, dependent and insecure. Mapuranga and Phillipa (2014) concluded that such prevailing social attitudes, not only determine the social expectation and treatment accorded to PWDs in the society, but also their self image and function.

This means that the stakeholders (the government, employers and co-workers) should help to do away with every attitudinal barrier militating against individuals with hearing impairment from gaining access to employment. The government should endeavour to compel employers of labour to employ people with hearing impairment in their organisations. Also, co-workers should relate cordially with those with hearing impairment. In essence, it will take the collaborative efforts among stakeholders in the labour market to remove all attitudinal

barriers that are preventing individuals with hearing from gaining access to employment opportunities in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

One of the major problems facing individuals with hearing impairment in Nigeria is limited or lack of access to employment opportunities. Those of them who are employed are not considered for jobs that require high level skills, rather they are considered for menial jobs. The reasons for this unwelcome situation are not far-fetched. Most people believe that individuals with hearing impairment cannot be as productive as their counterparts with normal hearing. Furthermore, many people are not aware of the potentials that individuals with hearing impairment possess. Many studies focused on other areas like social and psychological well-being of persons with hearing impairment with little focus on access to employment. The roles of stakeholders in gaining access to employment opportunities by persons with hearing impairment cannot be over-emphasized. They are expected to provide the necessary support to persons with hearing impairment.

The members of the society, co-workers and employers who are the stakeholders in the provision of employment opportunities for persons with hearing impairment in most of our contemporary societies are not supportive. They constitute all forms of barriers to persons with hearing impairment. In the same vein, Mapuranga and Phillipa (2014) reported that employees with disabilities are discriminated in the workplace. Co-workers perceive PWDS as generally incompetent as they would need the assistance of fellow workers to accomplish tasks while employers are of the view that some of the PWDS scare away

customers while some are dependent on fellow workers for accomplishment of tasks. Further, employers also perceive most PWDS as lacking knowledge and having poor educational qualifications. These situations hinder collaborations among persons with hearing impairment in gaining access to employment in Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered in the study:

1. What is the level of awareness of the stakeholders about employment and disabilities?
2. What is the attitude of stakeholders towards the employment of individuals with hearing impairment?
3. Is there collaboration among stakeholders on the employment of individuals with hearing impairment?

Literature Review

Attitude and employment of people with disability

Komp (2004) pointed out that most people with disabilities believed that the biggest concerns they have around the workplace are not about physical accessibility, but about attitudes. Again, many employers mistakenly believe that hiring a person with disability means that they are automatically compromising somehow on the quality or volume of work. That is, workers that really want to work might not have the right exposure to the business world and it means employers are still carrying around a lot of misconceptions about what it would really be like to work with a person with a disability every day.

Furthermore, Equal Employment Opportunities Trust (EEOT) (2005) pointed out that the biggest barrier to individuals with disabilities in workplace is negative attitude. According to EEOT (2005), the key factors emerging from literature review on

issues around employment and individuals with disabilities are:

- (i) Attitudinal barriers of employers and colleagues, fears about difficulties and challenges both real and perceived.
- (ii) People's abilities which can often be overlooked because of impairment.

Qualifications and Access to Employment opportunities by individuals with hearing impairment

Training and educational qualifications of individuals with hearing impairment have a way of helping them to gain access to opportunities. Literature indicated the implications of training and educational qualifications on access to employment. For instance, Meager and Hibbett (1999) pointed out that education or lack of education is also seen as a contributing factor to low participation rates in the workforce. They reported that there is a strong association between qualification level and whether a person with disability is economically active or not.

Hearing Loss and Employment

Hearing loss often affects access to employment opportunities. People who develop hearing loss are often reluctant to disclose their difficulties to their employers or co-workers, regardless of how difficult their hearing problem could be. Other reasons include:

- (i) stigmatization;
- (ii) anxiety about their ability to carry out the job;
- (iii) loss of potential career advancement;
- (iv) fear of being viewed as different or inefficient;
- (v) lack of information regarding disabilities and accommodation; and
- (vi) anxiety about changing jobs and the need to re-educate colleagues.

While it is usual for persons who suddenly become deaf to try to hide their problems from employers and co-workers, people who are hard of hearing have historically been reluctant to draw attention to their difficulties as regarding the hearing impairment. This is partly due to a natural sense of privacy about discussing disabilities in general, but mostly because of misconceptions about hearing loss as well as perceived threat to job security. Some people choose not to say anything but let their hearing aid speak for them. The results of not disclosing the onset of hearing loss or seeking available accommodation are many and distressing.

The effects include some people leaving their jobs or retiring early due to the psychological stress experienced by them; developing stress that can lead to increased illness; and self-esteem suffers greatly to the point that people with hearing loss choose to limit their career advancement. Moreover, the difficulty in processing information in meetings or other group situations is often interpreted by co-workers and supervisors as indication of being slow, not sharp or inattentive (Canadian Hard of Hearing Association, 2008).

Methodology

The study adopted descriptive survey research design of the ex-post facto type. The researchers examined access to employment opportunities by persons with hearing impairment in Oyo State, Nigeria. This design was adopted because the researchers did not manipulate the variables of interest in the study. The population for the study comprised all employers of labour, workers and government officials in Oyo State, Nigeria. The sample for this study comprised 87 employers, co-workers and government officials who are regarded as stakeholders in assisting persons with

hearing impairment to gain access to employment opportunities. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants for the study.

A self-designed questionnaire “Access to Employment by Persons with Hearing Impairment Questionnaire” (AEPHIQ) was used to collect data for the study. The instrument has two sections: Sections A and B. Section A contained items on the biodata of the participants, while Section B has to do with items on access of persons with hearing impairment to employment opportunities. The instrument was administered on thirty persons with hearing impairment who were not part of the sample for this study. The data collected were analysed and it yielded

0.77 reliability index. This showed that the instrument was reliable.

The instrument was administered on the participants through the help of research assistants. Initially, the respondents were intimated with the purpose of the study and it was made known to them that the exercise was for research purpose only. This created confidence in the respondents. The data collected in the study were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency count and percentage.

Results

Research Question One: What is the level of awareness of stakeholders about employment and disability?

Table 1: Level of awareness of stakeholders about disability

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD
1	Are you aware that there are different types of disabilities	14 (16.1%)	10 (11.5%)	20 (23.0%)	43 (49.4%)
2	Disability can be understood through medical model	30 (34.5%)	20 (23.0%)	29 (33.3%)	8 (9.2%)
3	Disability can be understood through social model	34 (39.1%)	25 (28.7%)	22 (25.3%)	6 (6.9%)
4	Disability cannot prevent individuals from work	43 (49.4%)	20 (23.0%)	10 (11.5%)	14 (16.1%)
5	People living with disability can contribute to the economy	27 (31.0%)	26 (30.0%)	21 (24.1%)	13 (14.9%)

From Table 1, 16.1% respondents strongly agreed that they are aware that there are different types of disabilities, while 11.5%, 23.0%, and 49.9% agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively.

The result further revealed that 34.5% strongly agreed that disability can be understood through medical model, 23.0%, 33.3%, 9.2% agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. Again, 39.1% strongly agreed that disability can be understood through social model, 28.7%,

25.3%, 6.9% agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively.

The result also showed that 49.4% strongly agreed that disability cannot prevent an individual from work, 23.0%, 11.5%, and 16.1% agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively.

Research Question Two: What is the attitude of stakeholders towards the employment of persons with hearing impairment?

Table 2: Attitude of stakeholders towards the employment of persons with hearing impairment

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD
1	It is a waste of resources to employ individuals with hearing impairment.	41 (47.1%)	34 (39.1%)	9 (10.4%)	3 (3.4%)
2	I cannot work with employees with hearing impairment.	37 (42.5%)	34 (39.1%)	13 (15.0%)	3 (3.4%)
3	Employees with hearing impairment are not productive.	39 (44.8%)	18 (20.7%)	17 (19.5%)	13 (15.0%)
4	Employees with hearing impairment are very lazy.	43 (49.4%)	22 (25.2%)	13 (15.0%)	9 (10.4%)
5	Employees with hearing impairment should be paid low wages	33 (38.0%)	29 (33.3%)	25 (28.7%)	0 (0%)

From Table 2, 47.1% strongly agreed that it is a waste of resources to employ individuals with hearing impairment while 39.1%, 10.3% and 3.34% agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. The finding revealed that 42.5% strongly agreed that they cannot work with employees with hearing impairment while 39.1%, 14.9%, agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively.

Furthermore, 44.8% strongly agreed that employees with hearing impairment are not productive while 20.7%, 19.5%, and 14.9% agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. The finding also revealed that

49.4% strongly agreed that employees with hearing impairment are lazy. 25.3%, 14.9% and 10.3% agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. 37.9% strongly agreed that employees with hearing impairment should be paid low wages. While 33.3%, 28.7%, and 0% agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively.

Research Question Three

What is the level of collaboration among stakeholders on the employment of individuals with hearing impairment?

Table 3: Collaboration among stakeholders on the employment of persons with hearing impairment

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD
1	Is there any disability policy in your organization?	15 (17.2%)	6 (6.9%)	31 (35.6%)	34 (39.1%)
2	Do you have regular meetings on the employment of individuals with hearing impairment in your organization?	5 (5.7%)	20 (23.0%)	23 (26.4%)	39 (44.9%)
3	Do you consider employing persons with hearing impairment as a means of exercising their fundamental human right?	10 (11.5%)	13 (14.9%)	32 (36.8%)	32 (36.8%)
4	Are you working hand in hand with other stakeholders to ensure that individuals with hearing impairment adjust to work place environment?	5 (5.7%)	20 (23.0%)	23 (26.4%)	39 (44.9%)
5	Will collaboration with other stakeholders give individuals with hearing impairment access to employment opportunities?	7 (8.0%)	9 (10.4%)	25 (28.7%)	46 (52.9%)

From Table 3, 17.2% strongly agreed that there was no disability policy in their organisation while 6.9%, 35.6% and 35.6% agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. Furthermore, the result of the study revealed that 5.7% strongly agreed that no regular meetings concerning the employment of individuals with hearing impairment in their place of work, while 23.0%, 26.4% and 44.8% agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. 11.5% strongly agreed that they considered the employment of individuals with hearing impairment as a means of exercising their fundamental human right. 14.9%, 36.8% and 29.9% agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. 5.7% strongly agreed that they are working hand in hand with other stakeholders to ensure that individuals with hearing impairment adjust to work place environment while 23.0%, 26.4% and 35.5% agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. 8.0% strongly agreed that collaboration with other stakeholders will make employees with hearing impairment to gain access to employment opportunities while 10.3%, 28.7% and 56.9% agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively.

Discussion

The study revealed that 16.1% strongly agreed that they are aware of issues of employment and disability and as much as 49.9% of the respondents strongly disagreed with the statement. By implication, the level of awareness is too low; hence no proper consideration is given to employees with hearing impairment in their organisations. This could be of the notion that the members of the society have towards persons with hearing impairment. It is, generally, believed that persons with hearing impairment are not productive as their normal hearing counterparts. This finding is in line with

Awe (2007) who reported that the neglected individuals with hearing impairment suffer in their places of work due to little or no awareness on the part of stakeholders about potentials of people with disabilities and related issues.

It was also revealed that the attitude of the stakeholders towards employees with hearing impairment was negative. 47.1% indicated that it is a waste of resources to employ individuals with hearing impairment, 44.8% indicated that employees with hearing impairment are not productive, 49.4% indicated that they are lazy and 37.9% indicated the employees with hearing impairment should be paid low wages. This could be as a result of poor understanding of the potentials of persons with hearing impairment with respect to employment and productivity. The finding corroborates Hernandez (2000) who reported that when specific attitudes towards workers with disabilities were assessed, they were, generally, negative.

The study revealed that 17.2% indicated that there was collaboration among professionals on the issues of the employment of workers with hearing impairment. Majority of them strongly disagreed with the issue of collaboration. This represents 35.6% of the respondents. This finding could be as a result of the inability of the stakeholders (employers and employees) to believe that employees with hearing impairment can compete favourably with their normal hearing counterparts, if the workplace is disability friendly. This finding corroborates Tunwase (2012) who reported that most stakeholders in the rehabilitation of persons with hearing impairment do not collaborate with other professionals as far as the employment of persons with hearing impairment is concerned.

Conclusion

This study established that employees with hearing impairment suffer neglect in their workplace and are not gainfully employed as a result of poor level of awareness on the part of stakeholders about disability issues and employment, negative attitude of stakeholders (employers and co-workers) and lack of collaboration on the part of the stakeholders on issues relating to employees with hearing impairment. It is, therefore, very important that all hands must be on deck to ensure that employees with hearing impairment are helped to fulfill their career goals and be integrated into the society through their chosen careers. This will in no small way help them to gain access to employment opportunities and contribute meaningfully to national income.

Recommendations

The following are recommended, based on the findings of the study:

1. The government should create adequate public awareness about disability and employment. This will make the employers to know that disabilities do not prevent one from work.
2. Employees with hearing impairment should be loved and valued by the employers and their co-workers like their counterparts with normal hearing. This will enhance their sense of belonging.
3. Efforts should be made by the stakeholders to collaborate with other professionals in order to better the lots of employees with hearing impairment.

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