

## Career Needs of Students with Disabilities in Federal University of Lafia

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### ABSTRACT

This study examined career needs of students with disabilities in Federal University of Lafia. Four research questions guided the study. A descriptive survey research design was employed in this study and was conducted in the Department of Special Needs Education. The population of the study comprised of 20 students with various forms of disabilities, including 10 hearing impaired, 4 visually impaired, 3 with learning disability, 2 amputees and 1 with cerebral palsy. The study employed purposive sampling technique to select the appropriate sample size for the study. Data analysis was performed using SPSS version 26.0, applying percentage and frequency for demographic information and descriptive statistics (mean) for research questions. The findings revealed that many internship and job programmes do not prioritize accessibility, making it difficult for students with disabilities to participate. The results found that most career workshops did not cater for the needs of students with disabilities, making it difficult for them to gain the skills required for the workforce. The study indicated that the presence of assistive technology in career services helps students become more familiar with tools and understand how they can support diverse talents. It was therefore, recommended that government should fund research on the career development needs of students with disabilities in higher education and use the findings to develop informed policies and guidelines.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Choosing a career is a crucial decision that has significant weight in one's life. It encompasses an individual's talents, mental faculties and social interactions, along with a capacity for adjustment. This is an illustration of a person's self-awareness and job-search skills, along with a thorough appreciation of the capabilities required for the position. A career is more than a brief job, profession, or vocation because it requires a great deal of preparation and is pursued for a long time. Early career choice-making increases a person's performance, degree of education and professional development. According to Salako and Adediran (2024), the decision of a profession may either tremendously benefit or severely hamper an individual, hence, the process of choosing a vocation is one of the uttermost significant choices that one must make in their lives. Choosing an inappropriate professional trajectory might result in feelings of dissatisfaction and sadness among students with impairment. To put it simply, a person's career choice has a significant impact on their entire life, so choosing a career is a challenging task that everyone must experience at some point in their lives. This includes selecting a vocation, training for it, starting it and progressing within it (Getange & Sagwe 2016). According to Alutu (2001), it is crucial to begin thinking about career choices for students with disabilities from the early years of nursery school and continue throughout primary, secondary and higher education.

More than just a job, a career is a long-term professional development and personal fulfillment that enables people to grow, learn, and contribute to society over time. A career can be defined as the trajectory and endeavors pursued by an individual throughout their lifetime, particularly in relation to their chosen professions (Olaosebikan & Olusakin, 2014). A career is a range of jobs, roles, or professional activities that a person engages in throughout their working life. Typically, it involves a progression in skills, responsibilities and accomplishments within a particular field or industry. As previously said, selecting a vocation is the most significant occurrence in an individual's life. An individual's success and subsequent fulfillment and pleasure are solely contingent upon the precise selection of their vocation. The detrimental impact on an individual's psychological well-being, particularly for those with disabilities, is significant when they make poor job choices or often change careers (Alkhelil, 2016).

Individuals who have physical, sensory, intellectual, mental health or learning disabilities that substantially impair their capacity to participate in normal educational activities are referred to as students with disabilities. These disabilities impact a student's capacity to see, hear, move, communicate, learn or process information in ways that are typical for their age or grade level. Adaka, Chia and Tarka (2023) stated that students with disabilities are those who have difficulties in realizing their full potential; their emotional, physical, social, or intellectual performance falls below or rises above that of others. The difference may be related to physical, cognitive, emotional, and psychosocial factors. Adaka, et al. also opined that persons with disabilities include those with hearing impairment, gifted/talented, visual, speech, and language impairment. Students

with disabilities may require additional support, resources, or accommodations to ensure they have equal access to educational opportunities. These accommodations can include assistive technologies, modified instructional methods, extended time for tests, or the use of sign language interpreters, depending on the nature and severity of the disability. Inclusive education aims to integrate students with disabilities into regular educational settings, ensuring they receive the appropriate support to learn and participate alongside their classmates.

As the value of inclusive education is recognized by society more and more, the career demands of students with disabilities in Nigerian institutions are receiving more attention. For students with disabilities, career development—which is already a complicated process—is made even more difficult by additional obstacles they face in the workplace and at educational institutions. The findings of Chukwu and Eze (2020) have shown that this demographic often faces limited career support, reduced access to internships and systemic biases, which collectively impede their successful transition from university to workforce. There are also other barriers in the transition to adulthood that students with disabilities encounter, e.g.: lack of knowledge and poor cooperation among parents, young people with intellectual disability and supporters, discrimination, being dependent, unawareness of their own disability and parents' low expectations about the future of their children with disabilities.

The Federal University of Lafia provides accommodations for students with physical, sensory and mild cognitive impairment. Each group faces unique challenges that can impact their career paths, such as the inability to access buildings and transportation options for students with physical disabilities and the difficulty of finding information in accessible formats for students with visual or hearing impairments (Ibrahim & Abubakar, 2022). The University recently printed out a an NDLEA pamphlet requiring various departments to release to all returning students but not consider in Braille for the visually impaired. Consequently, these challenges can result in significant disparities in career outcomes, with students with disabilities experiencing higher rates of unemployment and underemployment post-graduation compared to their non-disabled peers. The Nigerian labour market presents additional challenges, where prevailing misconceptions regarding the productivity and adaptability of people with disabilities persist. Employers frequently express concerns about the potential cost of workplace accommodations, which discourages them from hiring individuals with disabilities. This situation not only limits employment options for graduates with disabilities but also impacts the quality and stability of the positions they secure. Agbo and Obinna (2023) suggested that career services within universities should engage more actively with inclusive employers, forming partnerships to create pathways for students with disabilities. In light of these obstacles, it is essential to investigate the career needs of students with disabilities in Federal University of Lafia.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The Federal University of Lafia provides accommodations for students with physical, sensory, and mild cognitive impairments. Each group faces unique challenges that can impact their career paths, such as the inability to access buildings and transportation options for students with physical disabilities and the difficulty of finding information in accessible formats for students with visual or hearing impairments (Ibrahim & Abubakar, 2022). The university recently printed an NDLEA pamphlet requiring various departments it to release to all returning students, but did not consider in Braille for the visually impaired. Consequently, these challenges can result in significant disparities in career outcomes, with students with disabilities experiencing higher rates of unemployment and underemployment post-graduation compared to their non-disabled peers.

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### **Objectives**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the career needs of students with disabilities in Federal University of Lafia. This study was guided by the following objectives:

- i. To identify the specific career needs of students with disabilities in Federal University of Lafia.
- ii. To identify the career challenges faced by students with disabilities in Federal University of Lafia.
- iii. To examine the role of assistive technology in supporting career development of students with disabilities in Federal University of Lafia.
- iv. To suggest possible strategies for improving career services to students with disabilities in Federal University of Lafia.

### **Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- i. What are the specific career needs of students with disabilities in Federal University of Lafia?
- ii. What are the career challenges faced by students with disabilities?
- iii. What are the roles of assistive technology in supporting career development of students with disabilities?
- iv. What are the effective strategies for improving career services for students with disabilities?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

The study employed a descriptive survey design which Creswell (2014) describes as a type of research that depicts the state of affairs as it exists, where the researcher has no control over the variables and can only report what has happened or what is happening and attempts to discover causes when they cannot control the variables. This design was appropriate for this study as it focused on determining the career needs of students with disabilities in Federal University of Lafia.

### **Population and Sample**

The population for this study was twenty (20) students with disabilities from 100 to 400 levels in the Department of Special Education, Federal University of Lafia. The sample of the study consisted of all the 20 students with disabilities. These sample consisted of 10 hearing impaired, 4 visually impaired, 3 with a learning disability, 2 amputee and 1 with cerebral palsy. The study employed purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling technique was used because it allowed the use of cases that have the necessary information with respect to the theme of the research study selected. Thus the 20 respondents were purposively selected based on their characteristics of having disabilities.

### **Instrument for Data Collection**

The study employed a structured questionnaire titled Career Needs and Students with Disabilities (CNSD) to collect data from respondents. This questionnaire utilized a four-point Likert Scale, offering the following response options: Strongly Agree (SA) with 4 points, Agree (A) with 3 points, Disagree (D) with 2 points, and Strongly Disagree (SD) with 1 point. In total, the instrument consisted of 20 items that were directly related to the study's objectives. To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, both face and content validity were utilized. The instrument was presented to two experts in the field of Special Needs Education at the Federal University of Lafia, who carefully scrutinized it and provided feedback leading to necessary corrections. The reliability of the instrument was assessed using the Cronbach Alpha measure of internal consistency. This method evaluated the degree to which the items within the questionnaire were related as a group. The resulting alpha coefficient was found to be 0.74, indicating that the instrument was reliable. Notably, the data used to compute this reliability were gathered from 15 students with disabilities in College of Education, Akwanga, Nasarawa State outside the study area.

## **RESEARCH RESULT**

### **Method of Data Analysis**

The collected data were sorted, coded and transcribed. Mean score was used to determine the extent to which the research questions were consented to. The response with the highest mean was accepted as the opinion of the respondents. When the mean of the respondent is put at 2.50 and above, it was accepted and term valid and when it is below 2.50, it was rejected.

**Table 1: Socio-Demographic Information of the Respondents**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Male	8	40
Female	12	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Level</b>		
100L	6	30
200L	4	20
300L	7	35
400L	3	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Type of Disability</b>		
Hearing Impairment	10	50
Visual Impairment	4	20
Learning Disability	3	15
Amputee	2	10
Cerebral Palsy	1	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1 indicated that 8 respondents representing 40% were males while, 12 respondents representing 50% were females. This implies that the female students with disabilities in the Department of Special Needs Education dominated the male counterpart. The findings also revealed that 6 (30%) of the respondents were in 100L, 4 (20%) respondents were in 200L, 7 (35%) were in 300L and 3 (15%) of the respondents were in 400L. This implies that most students with disabilities were in 300L and have sound knowledge in career choice. This implies that the majority of students with disabilities were in 300L and had solid career-choice knowledge. The findings also shows that, 10 (60%) of the respondents had hearing impaired, 4 (20%) of them were visual impaired, 3 (25%) had learning disabilities, 2 (10%) were amputees, whereas 1 (5%) of the respondent had cerebral palsy. The findings revealed that, majority of the students had hearing impairment and they also face challenges in career needs.

**Research Question One:** What are the specific career needs of students with disabilities in Federal University of Lafia?

**Table 2: Means Responses of the Specific Career Needs of Students with Disabilities**

<b>S/N</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b><math>\bar{X}</math></b>
1	Internship programmes that ensure workplace accommodations and accessibility.	9	5	3	3	3
2	Accessible tools to help students identify suitable career paths based on their skills and interests.	7	4	5	4	2.7
3	Scholarships and grants supporting the education and career aspirations of students with disabilities.	11	6	2	1	3.4
4	Creation of peer groups for shared learning and encouragement.	6	9	3	2	2.9

5	Programmes designed to align academic experiences with potential career paths for students with disabilities.	8	7	4	1	4.2
<b>Overall Mean</b>						<b>16.2</b>

Table 2 reveals overall mean responses of 16.2. This implies the specific career needs of students with disabilities in Federal University of Lafia were all accepted. The table reveals that, items 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 with mean responses of 3, 2.7, 3.4, 2.9 and 4.2 above the criterion mean score (2.50) indicated that the respondents agreed that internship programmes, accessible tools, scholarships and grants, creation of peer groups for shared learning and designed programmes were career needs for students with disabilities.

**Research Question Two: What are the career challenges faced by students with disabilities in Federal University, Lafia?**

**Table 3: Mean Responses of the Career Challenges Faced by Students with Disabilities**

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{X}$
6	Inadequate infrastructure, such as the absence of ramps, elevators and accessible seating.	10	4	4	2	3.1
7	Many internship and job programmes do not prioritize accessibility.	5	8	2	5	2.7
8	Students with disabilities are not aware of the accommodations and resources available to them.	4	9	5	2	2.8
9	Most career workshops do not cater for the needs of students.	6	4	5	5	2.6
10	Tools for career development for students with disabilities are not expensive.	3	7	3	7	2.3
<b>Overall Mean</b>						<b>13.5</b>

Table 3 reveals overall mean responses of 13.5 on the career challenges faced by students with disabilities in Federal University, Lafia. The four items in the table (6, 7, 8 and 9) with the mean score of 3.1, 2.7, 2.8, 2.6 were accepted above the criterion mean score of 2.50. This mean that, the respondents agreed that the following challenges: inadequate infrastructure, lack of priority for their internship accessibility, students with disabilities are not aware of the accommodations and resources available to them and most career workshops do not cater for the needs of students with disabilities. However, items 10 with mean score of 2.3 below the criterion mean score of 2.50 was rejected. This signifies that the respondents disagreed that adaptive software or devices for students with disabilities are not expensive which is not true.

**Research Question Three: What are the roles of assistive technology in supporting career development of students with disabilities?**

**Table 4: Mean Responses of the Role of Assistive Technology in Supporting Career Development of Students with Disabilities**

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{X}$
11	Assistive technologies make it possible for students with disabilities to access online portals and other career resources.	8	7	3	2	3.1
12	Adaptive technologies empower students with disabilities to advocate for themselves.	5	9	2	4	2.8
13	It helps raise awareness among peers and lecturers about the capabilities of students with disabilities.	4	10	3	3	2.8
14	It helps students with disabilities develop industry-specific skills at their own pace.	12	5	2	1	3.4
15	It helps students become more familiar with tools and understand how they can support diverse talents.	13	3	2	2	3.3
<b>Overall Mean</b>						<b>15.4</b>

Table 4 illustrates the overall mean responses of 15.4 on the role of assistive technology in supporting career development of students with disabilities. The table further shows that items 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 had the mean scores 3.1, 2.8, 2.8, 3.4 and 3.3 above the criterion mean score 2.50. This means that assistive technology makes it possible for students with disabilities to access online job boards, application portals and other digital career resources, it empowers students with disabilities to advocate for themselves, raise awareness among peers and lecturers about the capabilities of students with disabilities and helps students become more familiar with tools and understand how they can support diverse talents.

#### **Research Question Four: What are the effective strategies for improving career services for students with disabilities?**

**Table 5: Mean Responses of the Effective Strategies for Improving Career Services for Students with Disabilities**

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{X}$
16	The university needs to invest in a wide range of assistive technologies to support different types of disabilities.	6	5	4	5	2.6
17	All the career service offices and event centres on campus need to add ramps, elevators and accessible seating.	9	6	3	2	3.1
18	The need to supply career services with assistive devices to support students with disabilities.	8	10	1	1	3.3
19	Individualized counselling to address the specific career needs and aspirations of students with disabilities.	10	4	3	3	3.1
20	The University need to provide career guides in multiple formats to the students with disabilities.	12	4	3	1	3.4
<b>Overall Mean</b>						<b>15.5</b>

Table 5 indicates the overall mean responses of 15.4 on the **effective strategies for improving career services for students with disabilities**. The table shows that items 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20 had the mean scores of 3.1, 2.8, 2.8, 3.4 and

3.3 greater than the criterion mean score of 2.50. This means that the respondents agreed that university and career services should invest in a wide range of assistive technologies to support different types of disabilities, ensure that the career service offices and event centre on campus are physically accessible, supply career services with assistive devices to support students with disabilities, offer individualized counselling and offer career guides in multiple formats to cater to various disabilities.

## **DISCUSSION**

The research sought to find out the specific career needs of students with disabilities in Federal University of Lafia. The findings revealed that internship programmes ensure workplace accommodations and accessibility. This agrees with Lindsay, Hartman, and Fellin (2018), who stated that programmes that ensure accommodations contribute significantly to the professional development internship of students with disabilities by providing equitable access to career opportunities. The study showed that accessible tools are needed to help students identify suitable career paths based on their skills and interests. These tools are particularly beneficial in supporting students with diverse needs, providing them with resources to explore various career options. Such tools help bridge educational and employment gaps, particularly for students who may have limited access to career counseling resources. The results revealed that scholarships and grants are aimed at supporting the education and career aspirations of students with disabilities. The findings of Okafor (2019) stated that scholarships enable students to focus on their studies without the additional stress of financial strain, which is particularly beneficial as students with disabilities may face higher educational costs due to the need for assistive devices and specialized resources. The findings indicated that designed programmes align academic experiences with potential career paths for students with disabilities. This is why Olaniyi (2019) emphasized that career counsellors work students to create personalized plans that relate with academic experiences and career aspirations, considering any accommodations or support they may need. This individualized guidance ensures that students have a clear vision of potential career paths that suit their skills and needs.

With regards to the career challenges faced by students with disabilities in Federal University, Lafia. The results revealed that inadequate infrastructure, such as the absence of ramps, elevators and accessible seating, makes it difficult for students with disabilities to attend career workshops and counselling sessions. The study discovered that many internship and job programmes do not prioritize accessibility, making it difficult for students with disabilities to participate. The study of Akinola (2020) lamented that many interview formats do not consider communication accommodations, such as sign language interpreters, which can create obstacles for students with hearing impairment. This lack of accessibility deters students from pursuing internships or job openings and prevents organizations from accessing a diverse talent pool. The findings indicated that, students with disabilities are not aware of the accommodations and resources available to them, within their educational

institution, this to some extent becomes a barrier to students with disabilities. The study discovered that most career workshops do not cater for the needs of students with disabilities, making it difficult for them to gain the skills required for the workforce. However, acquiring the necessary tools for career development, such as adaptive software or device are expensive and may not be covered by the university or government programmes.

The findings on the role of assistive technology in supporting the career development of students with disabilities in Federal University of Lafia revealed that assistive technologies, such as screen readers, voice recognition software, and text-to-speech tools, make it possible for students with disabilities to access online job boards, application portals, and other digital career resources. The study discovered that adaptive technologies empower students with disabilities to advocate for themselves, such as by preparing and rehearsing for job interviews. The findings further revealed that, integration of assistive technology in career development programmes helps raise awareness among peers and lecturers about the capabilities of students with disabilities. This study agrees with Ajayi (2021), who maintained that when students with disabilities use assistive technology to navigate academic tasks, complete internships, or participate in career training, it visibly demonstrates their skills and competence. Similarly, Okafor and Onu (2019) stated that integrating assistive technology in career development programs not only empowers students with disabilities but also raises awareness among their counterparts and potential employers about the diverse capabilities these students bring to the workforce.

The findings on effective strategies for improving career services for students with disabilities revealed that university and career services should invest in a wide range of assistive technologies to support different types of disabilities. It was also revealed that, University should invest in making career service offices and an event centre on campus physically accessible by adding ramps, elevators, and accessible seating. This is in congruence with the study of Adesina and Oluwadamilola (2021), who opined that accessible career service offices ensure that all students, including those with disabilities, have equal access to career guidance, resources, and networking opportunities. It was revealed that supply chain services with assistive devices such as screen magnifiers, speech recognition software, and adaptive keyboards were provided to support students with disabilities. Adedayo and Chukwu (2020) asserted that assistive devices enable students with various disabilities to access career resources with ease. The results also showed that offering individualized counseling is one the strategies of improving the career services needs and aspirations of students with disabilities. The means that career guides, handbooks, and other materials in multiple formats (e. g., braille, large print, audio) are effective to cater for the needs of students with disabilities.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Conclusion**

Addressing the career needs of students with disabilities in Federal University of Lafia requires a comprehensive approach prioritizing accessibility and support services. Key elements include making physical spaces accessible,

providing assistive devices, offering tailored career guidance and workshops, and investing in awareness programs and inclusive policies. An inclusive career support system enables students with disabilities to participate in career development activities and prepares them for the workforce with skills and confidence.

### **Recommendations**

To effectively support the career needs of students with disabilities in the University, the following recommendations are essential:

1. The university should ensure that career service offices, event centers and other relevant facilities are physically accessible for students with disabilities.
2. The government together with other Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) should equip career services with essential assistive devices to facilitate independent access for students with disabilities.
3. The government should organize a workshop, seminar and training for career counsellors to understand the unique career challenges and strengths of students with disabilities.
4. The government should fund research on the career development needs of students with disabilities in higher education and use the findings to develop informed policies and guidelines.

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