

THE EXTENT AND IMPACT OF ENVIRONMENTAL-ABLEISM, ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICE, EDUCATIONAL DIS-INCLUSIVITY AND SERVICES EXCLUSION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY: A CASE STUDY OF HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY IN ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Studies on stigmatization, discrimination and marginalization of people with disability need to integrate ableism. The sample size for this study constituted of eighty students with disabilities and twenty teachers, social workers and other public officials working in the areas of service provision to students with disabilities. Interviews and focus group discussions were adopted for data collection. Triangulation was used for analysis. The results revealed a high extent of environmental-ableism, environmental injustice, educational dis-inclusivity, service exclusion, marginalization, discrimination, and stigmatisation of people with disability. These have adverse effects on PWDs psychologically, education and access to social services. There was basically no government efforts to tackle these challenges in the study area. The study advocated the need for effective country-wide community education campaigns to eliminate myths, mindsets, culture and traditions feeding these challenges.

Keywords: Environmental-ableism, environmental injustice, educational dis-inclusivity, services exclusion, discrimination of people with disability (PWDs)

Introduction

While not exhaustive, stigmatization, discrimination and marginalization of people with disability (PWDs) is part of the field of environmental communication that has yet to integrate disability or ableism as a primary area of research or intersectional investment. ‘Ableism’ is the discrimination or prejudice against disabled people in favour of non-disabled people. Eco-ableism is a failure by non-disabled environmental activists to recognise that many of the environmental and educational actions they are promoting make life difficult for disabled people. Eco-ableism may be defined as the marginalization of disabled people through environmental design; the exclusion of disabled people in environmental decision-making; and the discrimination against disabled people through environmental discourses, beliefs, and attitudes. Environmental-ableism is important if environmental justice, educational inclusivity for all especially the disabled would be impossible. Thus, people who are disabled should be heard and seen, not excluded (Cram, Law & Pezzullo, 2022; Haddock, 2022).

Disability is a term used in legal medicine to apply especially to the loss of mental or physical powers as a result of injury or disease. In this sense, therefore, any person whose ability to function is limited by physical, cognitive, visual or environmental factors is said to have a disability. Over the years, the meaning of disability has evolved constantly, although it has generally shifted from the medical model – which views disability as an individual deficiency, to the social model – which asserts that it is social and economic structures that create disability (Anatasious & Kaufmann, 2011; WHO, 2011).

On the other hand, social stigmatization, discrimination and marginalization of people with disabilities is the most difficult barrier to living normal. Social stigmatization refers to the social process of devaluing

people or groups based on a real or perceived difference such as gender, age, sexual orientation, behavior, ethnicity or socially identified status. It is also the disapproval of, or discrimination against, a person based on perceivable social characteristics that serve to distinguish them from other members of a society. Marginalization is the process in which individuals are blocked from various rights, opportunities, and resources that are normally available to members of a different group, and which are fundamental to social integration and observance of human rights within that particular group. Discrimination follows stigma and is unfair and unjust treatment of an individual based on socially identified status a society that labels certain people as outside the norm – weird, scary, hateful or useless – marginalizes those people, edging them out (Holley, Mendoza, Del-Colle, Bernard, 2016; Baffoe, 2013).

The 2011 report of the World Health Organization and the World Bank estimated that fifteen percent of the world's population, over one billion, are people with disabilities. It is estimated that 80 percent of these people live in developing countries including Nigeria (WHO, 2022). It is estimated that Nigeria has more than 22 million citizens with disabilities though a valid census of these people has not been conducted since after independence from Britain in 1960 (Obiakor & Eleweke, 2014; Eleweke, 2013).

Historically, persons with disabilities have been confronted with not only the physical and mental impediments of their disability, but also with the accompanying social stigma and negative social attitudes. A persistent negative attitude and social rejection of people with disabilities is evident throughout history and across cultures. Ancient Roman and Greek cultures viewed persons with physical disabilities as burdens on society and as less than human. Research has shown, however, that the degree of social rejection and social stigma varies with specific disabilities. But on the contrary, Muslim scholars and leaders believed it is the duty of society to

provide appropriate education to children with disabilities in inclusive environments. The society has an obligation to meet the life needs of disabled people by providing equal opportunities to education and employment (Naz & Aurangzeb, 2002).

Some believe disability to be a curse from god and compensation is required by resorting to sacrifice, charity, or visits to shrines. For others, it is a punishment for their sins. These cultural myths and superstitious beliefs towards person with disabilities can create situations that lead to the further isolation and stigmatization of persons with disabilities. Family structure can also be a major hindrance to the reintegration of persons with disabilities to become useful members of society (Baffoe, 2013).

Environmental-ableism, environmental injustice, educational dis-inclusivity, services exclusion, marginalization, discrimination, and stigmatisation of people with disability is the single most difficult barrier to living “better” and productive lives by persons with disabilities (Baffoe, 2013). They result in stereotyping, fear, embarrassment, anger, and avoidant behaviours, oppression including ability to maintaining relationships and enjoy quality of life; the subordinate position of: limited representation in the formal political system, a large share of the economy's informal sector and other types of labour with reduced financial rewards, almost exclusive responsibility for family and children, and the more subtle signs of narrow career aspirations and low self-esteem. Removing such barriers that hinder the day-to-day lives of people with disabilities is therefore critical to improving their social participation (UNDP, 2013).

Further, the impact of environmental-ableism, environmental injustice, educational dis-inclusivity, services exclusion, marginalization, discrimination, and stigmatisation of people with disability across nations and various social scientific bodies of research especially on women, racial/ethnic minorities, and sexual minorities (Conron, Mimiaga, & Landers, 2010; Chan, Lam, Chow, & Cheung, 2008; Williams, Neighbors, & Jackson, 2008) continues in limited social contacts, poor health, and low self-esteem. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA, 2007) and Peters (2009) report these impacts in the form of high levels of

stress, anxiety, insecurity, and intense fear to exist on a significant number of children and youths globally.

In Africa perhaps, one of the most consistent findings of the impact of environmental-ableism, environmental injustice, educational dis-inclusivity, services exclusion, marginalization, discrimination, and stigmatisation of people with disability is the increased impact on poorer mental health across a variety of outcomes (Frost & Meyer, 2009; Hatzenbuehler, 2009; Meyer, Dietrich, et al., 2008; Meyer, Schwartz, et al., 2008; Frost, Parsons, & Nanln, 2007; Mays & Cochran, 2001)

In Nigeria, evidence indicates that the impact of environmental-ableism, environmental injustice, educational dis-inclusivity, services exclusion, marginalization, discrimination, and stigmatisation of people with disability continue in the forms of exclusion, barriers and negative attitudes in accessing services in the country. As a result, income-generating opportunities become further reduced, leading to chronic poverty, further exclusion, and higher risks of illness, injury and impairment (Obiakor & Eleweke, 2014; Eleweke, 2013; Peters, 2008).

Technological advancement, globalization, internationalization of media and effort made by international institutions, including international non-governmental organizations have created some respite for students who are living with disability to compete with limited footing but situations unfortunately are very much unsatisfactory because of the many issues in environmental-ableism, environmental injustice, educational dis-inclusivity, services exclusion, marginalization, discrimination, stigmatisation and services access barriers to opportunities amongst students with disability (Eleweke, Ebenso, 2016). It is this environmental-ableism, environmental injustice, educational dis-inclusivity, services exclusion, marginalization, discrimination, and stigmatisation of students with disability and their ramifications that is the basis of this study.

Materials and methods

Participants for the study were one hundred persons consisting of eighty students with disabilities, and twenty other persons (teachers, social workers and other public officials working in the areas of service provision to students with disabilities) selected through a purposive sampling process due to the attribute of disability and official work functions in the areas of service provision to persons with disabilities.

Of the higher institutions of learning in Enugu state, the University of Nigeria, Nsukka was purposively selected since it is home to the Association of Students with Special Needs. The University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) is a federal University in Enugu State, Nigeria. It was founded in 1955 by Nnamdi Azikiwe (Governor-General of Nigeria from 1960 to 1963 and first president of Nigeria from 1963 to 1966). It was formally opened in 1960. UNN operates about 102 academic departments across about 17 faculties. It offers about 82 undergraduate programmes and over 211 postgraduate programmes for a student population of over 36,000. It does so across four campuses: Nsukka campus, Enugu campus (UNEC), University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital (UNTH) in Ituku-ozalla and the Aba campus (UNAC). There is also a UNN business school (Times Higher Education, THE, 2021).

Research activities obtain in faculties of agriculture, arts, biological sciences, education, engineering, pharmaceutical sciences, physical sciences, social sciences, vocational teacher education and veterinary medicine, dentistry, health sciences and technology, business administration, environmental studies, law, basic medical sciences, medical sciences, University Teaching Hospital (UNTH), Aba campus (UNAC), Institute for African Studies, Institute of Education, Institute for Development Studies, College of Postgraduate Studies, Institute of Herbal Medicine and Drugs Research and Development, besides the Centre for Climate Change, Centre for Space Science and Energy Research (THE, 2021).

This study adopted the use of triangulation based on the premise that the weaknesses or flaws of one method will be compensated by the strengths

of another (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007). Triangulation refers to the use of more than one approach to the investigation of a research question in order to enhance confidence in the ensuing findings (Bryman, 2004). Good research practice requires the researcher to triangulate, that is, to use multiple methods, researches and data sources to enhance the validity of research findings. Thus, the findings obtained from the different methods used was corroborated to strengthen the validity and reliability in the study. The methods of in-depth interview and focus group discussion was combined. For the phenomenology segment of the inquiry, audiotape, field notes and photographs were used in conducting the interviews and focus group discussions, in line with Ugwu (2012). Descriptive and narrative techniques were used in the presentation and analysis of data. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim. Respondent information, field notes and transcribed audio recordings generated from the interviews and focus-group discussions were coded and organized according to categories in order to facilitate the analysis of the data.

Results and discussion

The extent of environmental-ableism, environmental injustice, educational dis-inclusivity, services exclusion, marginalization, discrimination, and stigmatisation of people with disability in the University of Nigeria Nsukka

From the in-depth interview (IDI) and focus group discussion it was revealed that environmental-ableism, environmental injustice, educational dis-inclusivity, services exclusion, marginalization, discrimination, and stigmatisation of people with disability exist in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka and was evident as the PWDs narrated several experiences pin-pointing, a high extent of environmental-ableism, environmental injustice, educational dis-inclusivity, services exclusion, marginalization, discrimination, and stigmatisation of people with disability. For instance,

from the in-depth interview (IDI 1), a male student narrated thus, “stigmatization of people with disabilities here in UNN is so much that we are not regarded as citizens who deserve to be here. We are not given the same opportunity as the sighted students. Even in our various departments, some do not care to hear from us in terms of participating in class. In the aspect of assignments and exams, they believe machineries assist us and that is why some lecturers do give such undeserving grades not minding what the student wrote. So they do not grade us based on our capabilities but based on discrimination. This prejudice seems to have been formed in their minds”. He also went further in his response to say thus, “the rate of stigmatization is very high. Even in our hostels, and in our mode of gaining admission into this school, opportunities are not accorded according to capabilities. We are not being admitted the way we ought to even though, the University gives us some form of ‘preferential treatment’ which is not so extraordinary. In short, the level of discrimination is high”.

Also, (in-depth interview) IDI 6, a female student stated that, “the level of environmental-ableism, environmental injustice, educational disinclusivity, services exclusion, marginalization, discrimination, and stigmatisation in the school is high. Based on my experience, we are being stigmatized in UNN. For instance in my department, they do not allow me to do certain things because they feel that I cannot do it since I am blind”. In the area of discrimination she stated thus, “in my department, sometimes, when I am sitting down on a particular seat, some persons will leave that sit because they do not want to sit close or have contact with me”. She also stated that persons with disabilities are marginalized. In her response, “we are also marginalized in UNN because we do not flow well with the sighted ones. It is just like we are laid in a corner”.

These above assertions were affirmed in the first focus group discussion which consisted of male participants. They responded thus, “the level of environmental-ableism, environmental injustice, educational disinclusivity, services exclusion, marginalization, discrimination, and stigmatisation in the school is high. It is very high and possibly above 70 percent. From the class to the shuttle park and also in our churches, some

people do not want to come close with us and the few ones that come close to us are stigmatized. Something should be done about this”.

Also, in the second focus group discussion which consisted of female participants, respondents narrated thus, “in UNN, we are been marginalized because they do not give us the opportunity to express our right, that is, to come out for any political position. They think there is nothing we can contribute to the society. Even when you come out, you will not be voted for in the school”.

These above assertions were affirmed by the third focus group discussion which consisted of teachers, and social workers and public officials working in the areas of service provision to students with disabilities. They affirmed that most of the public places like shops, canteens, hostels and class-rooms, in Enugu state and Nigeria do not cater to the environmental and access needs of the physically disabled persons. A female participant responded thus, “Ramps for wheel chairs are absent and the gradient is too steep for PWDs to use independently while public buses are not easily accessible to persons with disability”.

The service exclusion that people with disabilities experience in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka as a result of environmental-ableism, environmental injustice, educational dis-inclusivity, marginalization, discrimination, and stigmatization

Stemming from environmental-ableism, environmental injustice, educational dis-inclusivity, marginalization, discrimination, and stigmatization it was noted from the indept interview and focus group discussion that people with disabilities in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka experience service exclusion in several areas such as education, health, job/employment, supporting legislation, accessing roads, buildings, social intervention programs, accessing funding etc. Most of the PWDs narrated their experiences on how they have been excluded in having access to

certain social services. For instance IDI 1 (in-depth interview), a male student that is physically challenge stated thus, “educationally we are not given a lot of equal opportunities with those living without disabilities. In the area of health service for instance, if a disabled person is weak, the kind of attention he/she would receive from the immediate community would not be as much as it would be given to those who are not disabled. Employment in the society is appalling for PWDs. The society thinks that the disabled are not useful in the work environment. This is because we have been disregarded in the society. We have no voice nor legislation. I do not think any disabled person has been voted to the National Assembly. We are partly being considered in social intervention programs, but it is thought of as a privilege. We do not talk of fund(s) let, alone access to it especially loan for business. This is due to the negative perception of people towards PWDs”.

Again, (in-depth interview) IDI 7, a female student that is physically challenge stated thus, “there are service exclusions that people with disabilities experience in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka as a result of environmental-ableism, environmental injustice, educational dis-inclusivity, marginalization, discrimination, and stigmatization. For instance, we find it hard to access some textbooks because it is in hard copy and not in soft copy. In the aspect of accessing buildings and roads we also find it hard too because they are too bad for us to navigate around and within the school nor, built with PWDs in mind. In the area of health-care, there is service exclusion”.

Further on the question above, response from the first focus group discussion which consisted of male students stated thus, “in the area of employment, it is poor we are not been accommodated. Sometimes even non-disabled students and lecturers wonder if there is a special work for us; and they sometimes have that persuasion that we cannot work in offices”. In the second focus group discussion which consisted of female students, Participant b stated thus, “in the area of accessing funds, there is service exclusion that people with disabilities experience as a result of environmental-ableism, environmental injustice, educational dis-inclusivity, marginalization, discrimination, and stigmatization. This is

because they believe that we cannot pay back what we borrowed be it a bank or any other financial institution”.

These above assertions were affirmed by the third focus group discussion which consisted of teachers, and social workers and public officials working in the areas of service provision to students with disabilities. They affirmed that the areas of health, job creation/employment, supporting legislation, accessing roads, buildings, social intervention programs, accessing funding were not appropriately designed appropriately to the access and specific needs of the physically disabled persons. A female participant responded thus, “there are infrastructural barriers that exclude full and enjoyable participation in the workplace. This is frustrating and embarrassing and keeps PWDs outside their optimal capacity”.

The impact of environmental-ableism, environmental injustice, educational dis-inclusivity, services exclusion, marginalization, discrimination, and stigmatisation on people with disabilities in University of Nigeria Nsukka

From the indepth interview and focus group discussion, it was noted that environmental-ableism, environmental injustice, educational dis-inclusivity, marginalization, discrimination, and stigmatization experienced by people with disabilities in University of Nigeria Nsukka have great impact on PWDs by affecting them psychologically, in their education and in accessing social services in and around the University. For instance IDI 5 (indepth interview), a male student who is physically challenged when asked responded that environmental-ableism, environmental injustice, educational dis-inclusivity, marginalization, discrimination, and stigmatization affect and impact PWDs in their educational pursuit. “Environmental-ableism, environmental injustice, educational dis-inclusivity, marginalization, discrimination, and stigmatization affect the

emotionally and psychologically balance of PWDs thereby affecting their education too”.

The first focus group discussion which consisted of male participants also affirmed that in the area of attitudinal bias impact that, “some parents who have a child with disability sometimes think that his or her child is no longer useful. This affects the child psychologically which can only be corrected if the child is trained and reintegrated back to the society thereby helping the child to develop in all aspects of life.” In the aspect of social services access impact, IDI 6 (indepth interview), a female student who is visually impaired responded thus, “the in-balance that persists in accessing social services for PWDs affects their education”. For instance she added, “Getting someone to take us to school is one of the challenges we face”. This she went on to state, “affects PWDs psychologically and makes PWDs feel that they do not belong there”. This was affirmed in the second focus group discussion which consisted of female participants that responded thus, “Political leaders do not provide us with the necessary things we need because they feel we are not useful and cannot/ do not contribute anything to the society. Thus, we find it hard, for example to access Automated Teller Machines (ATM) when we go to the bank and because of the absence of government programs to provide equipment’s like laptops, braille machines, scanners, and other assistive technologies, the education of PWDs is impacted negatively”.

These above assertions were affirmed by the third focus group discussion which consisted of teachers, and social workers and public officials working in the areas of service provision to students with disabilities. They affirmed that “the absence or inadequacy of needed facilities and equipment for the health care of disable persons, their education, transportation, training and empowerment have negative and high impact on PWDs especially with absence of political will and commitment on the part of the government to ensure, protect and promote the interest of people living with disability in Nigeria.

Government efforts in Nsukka Local Government Area, Enugu state generally delimiting environmental-ableism, environmental injustice,

educational dis-inclusivity, marginalization, discrimination, and stigmatization of people with disabilities in University of Nigeria Nsukka

From the responses of persons living with disabilities in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka it was revealed from the indepth interview and focus group discussion conducted that there were no government efforts in delimiting service exclusion and all forms of environmental-ableism, environmental injustice, educational dis-inclusivity, marginalization, discrimination, and stigmatization of people with disabilities. IDI 1 (indepth interview), when he was asked government efforts in Nsukka Local Government Area, Enugu state generally delimiting service exclusion in: Special needs education, Health service, Job creation/employment, Supporting legislation, Accessing facilities such as buildings, roads, streets, house yards, etc., Social intervention programs, Accessing funding/funds; responded thus, “there is no effort by government in any respect”. He also noted that there is no government effort in trying to delimit all forms of environmental-ableism, environmental injustice, educational dis-inclusivity, marginalization, discrimination, and stigmatization of persons with disabilities in Nsukka Local Government Area, Enugu state. IDI 7 (in-depth interview) also affirmed same to the above question thus, “there is no government effort in any of these areas stated above to improve the well-being of PWDs. In the first focus group discussion also, Participant c noted that there is no government effort in reducing problems that people with disabilities face in Nsukka. In the second focus group discussion, Participant b also stated that, “there is no government effort in reducing environmental-ableism, environmental injustice, educational dis-inclusivity, marginalization, discrimination, and stigmatization of people with disabilities in Nsukka Local Government Area, Enugu state.

Summary

Despite the effort of international organizations such as the United Nations and other regional organizations, and various governments in formulating and enacting laws aimed at ensuring the rights of disabled people throughout the world, is been adequately addressed, Nigeria; for a number reasons; socially, culturally, politically and economically and, by reason of; certain authorities, lack of money to supply the needed facilities and equipment still largely inadequate and dysfunctional, few and limited facilities for the health care of disable persons, their education, transportation, training and empowerment and sometimes; usually, not easily accessible to most of PWDs; still; dis-serve PWDs. Thus, PWDs are to a large extent discriminated against, segregated and marginalized while the impact and extent of environmental-ableism, environmental injustice, educational dis-inclusivity, and services exclusion is unduly negative and high. What is evident is no political will and commitment on the part of the government to ensure, protect and promote the interest of people living with disability in Nigeria.

Recommendation: Mobilizing communities for action

To make a positive difference in the lives of persons with disabilities in Enugu state and Nigeria at large, there is the need for effective country-wide community education campaigns aimed at eliminating the environmental-ableism, environmental injustice, educational dis-inclusivity, marginalization, discrimination, stigmatization, myths, negative perceptions, stereotyping superstitions and their resultant discrimination and marginalization of persons with disabilities. There is also the need for mobilization and community support for services directed at persons with disabilities. These public education and community mobilization campaigns should be aimed at getting people to recognize and accept persons with disabilities as people first. They should not be tagged as disable, ill, needy to be cured. These will hopefully lead to eventual public support, acceptance and environmental justice, educational inclusivity, of persons with disabilities which is important for the promotion of the ideals of an egalitarian society.

This study also recommends that:

1. The Nigerian president should as a matter of urgency implement the disability law to address all forms of threat environmental, eco-related, and educational, etc. to disable persons. All forms of discriminations – socially, economically, politically and in terms of education, transportation, health and other welfare matters should be addressed immediately.
2. The government should engage in a wide and rigorous public enlightenment campaign against the discrimination of disable people in the Nigerian society
3. The federal government should introduce a disability tax fund (DTF) which should be used for the provision of environmental justice, educational inclusivity, social security and welfare of persons with disabilities

Conclusion

In conclusion and as recommended by Bigby and Frawley (2010), both state, individual and structural levels, should find themselves in promoting the notion that all children are capable of learning and becoming recipients of quality education if the right atmosphere of inclusion and acceptance are created thereby, redressing disadvantages, improving quality of life, and bringing about social change to reduce environmental-ableism, environmental injustice, educational dis-inclusivity, marginalization, discrimination, and stigmatization that result from the unfortunate situations that persons with disabilities face in society.

Also, the deficit-based approach and newer approaches known as the strength-based approach (Bertolino, 2010) which is of the foundational persuasion that clients have unique talents, skills, and life events, are peoples' personal strengths that especially aid development, recovery and empowerment of persons with disabilities. Thus, the use of stigmatizing language or terminology, environmental in-just, educational dis-inclusive designs and approaches should be stopped. Again, social workers should facilitate this development by ensuring that public facilities and resources

are environmental just, educational inclusive and, equally available to persons with disabilities to give them the same opportunities for a meaningful social experience in life

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