

GENDER DISPARITIES IN EDUCATION AND SKILLS ACQUISITION AMONG PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN NORTH CENTRAL NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Despite Nigeria's commitment to inclusive education, persons with disabilities (PWDs) continue to experience disparities in educational attainment and economic opportunities. This study examined gender differences in education and skills acquisition among PWDs in North Central Nigeria, with the aim of informing more equitable inclusion strategies. A cross-sectional design was employed, targeting 428 respondents drawn from six states using multistage sampling. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics and chi-square tests. Results revealed significant gender disparities: 54.8% of female respondents had no formal education compared to 35.6% of males ($\chi^2 = 10.846$, $p < 0.05$). Skills acquisition was also gendered, with males more likely to engage in trades such as welding and mechanics, while females were concentrated in tailoring and hairdressing. Barriers identified included stigma, poverty, inaccessible learning environments, and lack of gender-sensitive policies. The study concludes that disability inclusion strategies must address both disability- and gender-related inequities. Policy recommendations include integrating disability perspectives into educational planning, providing gender-responsive vocational training, and enforcing accessibility standards in learning facilities.

Keywords: Persons with disabilities, gender disparities, education, skills acquisition, North Central Nigeria.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Education is globally recognized as a key driver of social and economic empowerment, yet persons with disabilities (PWDs) often face systemic barriers to access and quality. In Nigeria, these challenges are compounded by socio-cultural norms, infrastructural barriers, and limited policy implementation. Gender further influences these inequalities, with women and girls with disabilities experiencing a “double disadvantage” due to intersecting discrimination (WHO, 2011).

Although Nigeria has signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and adopted the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act (2018), implementation gaps persist. National surveys indicate that PWDs are less likely to enroll in school, complete primary education, or acquire employable skills (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). These disparities are more pronounced in rural and economically disadvantaged regions, such as North Central Nigeria, where poverty and limited infrastructure exacerbate exclusion.

Previous studies have examined general barriers to disability inclusion (Ajuwon, 2012; Eleweke & Rodda, 2010) but have paid limited attention to gender-specific dynamics within education and vocational training. Understanding these dynamics is essential for designing responsive interventions that promote equal opportunity.

This study therefore aimed to:

1. Assess gender differences in educational attainment among PWDs in North Central Nigeria.
2. Examine gender patterns in skills acquisition among PWDs.
3. Identify barriers to gender-equitable participation in education and vocational training.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review synthesizes key conceptual definitions, theoretical perspectives, and empirical findings relevant to gender disparities in education and skills acquisition among persons with disabilities (PWDs) in North Central Nigeria. It draws on the study context, findings, and references included in the submitted manuscript.

2.1 Conceptual Review

Conceptually, the study rests on three interrelated constructs: disability, gender, and skills acquisition/education. “Disability” is understood not only as an individual impairment but as a social condition shaped by barriers in the environment and institutions (i.e., a move beyond purely medical framing). This aligns with the distinction between impairment and disability found across disability literature and reflected in national policy frameworks referenced in the manuscript (e.g., CRPD; Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities Act).

“Gender” in this context refers to socially constructed roles, expectations, and power relations that produce differences in opportunity and outcomes for men and women. When gender intersects with disability it produces compounded or “double” disadvantages for women and girls with disabilities, a theme emphasised in international reports and cited local studies.

“Education” and “skills acquisition” are treated as both outcomes (levels of formal schooling attained) and processes (access to, quality of, and transitions from schooling into vocational training or the labour market). The literature differentiates formal education (primary/secondary schooling) from non-formal and vocational/technical skills training (VET), noting that market segmentation and cultural norms often shape which trades are available or considered appropriate by gender. The manuscript’s data (e.g., higher non-attendance among female PWDs and gendered clustering into tailoring/hairstyling versus welding/mechanics) illustrates these conceptual distinctions.

2.2 Theoretical Review

Several theoretical framing inform analyses of gendered disability exclusion and vocational segmentation:

Social Model of Disability — Emphasizes that barriers (physical, attitudinal, institutional) create disability by disabling people with impairments. This model highlights the role of inaccessible infrastructure, lack of assistive devices, and discriminatory practices—barriers identified empirically in the study region.

Intersectionality — Originating from feminist scholarship, intersectionality explains how overlapping identities (gender, disability, rurality, poverty) produce unique forms of disadvantage. The manuscript’s finding of a “double disadvantage” for women with disabilities maps directly onto this theoretical lens and explains why single-axis policy responses (disability only or gender only) are insufficient.

Human Capital and Labour Market Segmentation — Human capital theory links education and skills to employability and income; however, labour market segmentation theory qualifies this by showing how social norms and employer preferences channel different groups into occupational niches. The observed gendered trade distribution (male dominated technical trades; female dominated care/soft trades) suggests both constrained human capital opportunities and segmented labour markets that reproduce income inequalities.

Capability Approach — Emphasising what people are able to be and do, this approach foregrounds substantive freedoms (e.g., access to relevant skills training, enabling environments). It is useful for evaluating whether education and VET expand real opportunities for PWDs, particularly women, beyond mere enrolment statistics.

Bringing these theories together provides a multi-level analytical toolkit: the social model and intersectionality explain exclusional mechanisms; human capital and segmentation explain labour outcomes; the capability approach provides normative grounds for programmatic interventions.

2.3 Empirical Review

Empirical studies—both international and Nigerian—consistently document the gap the current study explores. National surveys and Nigeria-specific research cited in the manuscript show lower school enrolment and completion rates for PWDs, with disparities amplified for females and in rural/poorer regions. The manuscript references National Bureau of Statistics reports and prior Nigerian studies that report similar patterns of exclusion and constrained access to vocational training.

Key empirical patterns relevant to this study:

Higher non-attendance and lower completion for female PWDs. The manuscript's finding that 54.8% of female respondents had no formal education versus 35.6% of males echoes broader evidence that girls with disabilities are less likely to access or complete schooling due to poverty, stigma, and gendered domestic responsibilities.

Gendered occupational clustering in skills acquisition. Multiple local studies report that females with disabilities are overrepresented in trades like tailoring and hairdressing, while males dominate technical trades (e.g., welding, mechanics). This pattern limits income potential for women and increases vulnerability—findings directly mirrored in the present dataset.

Barriers: stigma, poverty, inaccessible infrastructure, lack of gender-sensitive programming.

The weight of barriers identified in the manuscript (high percentages reporting stigma, poverty, inaccessible facilities, and lack of assistive devices) matches prior empirical work in Nigeria and neighbouring contexts, underscoring persistent implementation gaps despite legal frameworks.

Policy–practice gap. While Nigeria has ratified international instruments (e.g., CRPD) and enacted domestic laws, empirical work—including the submitted study—documents a consistent gap between policy commitments and on-the-ground realities for PWDs, especially women. Program evaluations and surveys in the literature call for targeted scholarships, accessibility enforcement, community sensitisation, and gender-transformative vocational programming—recommendations the manuscript also advances.

Gaps identified in the empirical literature

The empirical corpus still shows several gaps that the current study helps address: few region-specific studies focused on North Central Nigeria; limited disaggregation of vocational outcomes by both gender and disability type; and scarce longitudinal evidence on whether vocational training for women with disabilities leads to sustained income gains. The present cross-sectional evidence contributes regionally specific data and highlights the need for interventions that explicitly combine disability inclusion with gender-responsive skills programming.

Synthesis: Conceptually and theoretically, scholarship supports viewing gendered disability exclusion as produced by overlapping social, institutional, and market mechanisms. Empirically, the patterns observed in North Central Nigeria (higher female non-attendance, gendered skills segmentation, pervasive barriers) track both national trends and international findings. This literature base justifies policy prescriptions that are intersectional, gender-sensitive, and focused on both supply (accessible schooling, gender-responsive VET) and demand (labour market linkages, anti-stigma measures)

3.0

. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Area

The study was conducted in North Central Nigeria, comprising six states and the Federal Capital

Territory. The region is characterized by ethnic diversity, mixed urban-rural settlements, and varying levels of infrastructural development.

3.2 Research Design

A cross-sectional survey design was adopted to capture current patterns in education and skills acquisition among PWDs.

3.3 Study Population and Sampling

The population consisted of PWDs aged 15 years and above residing in the study area. A multistage sampling technique was used:

- Stage 1: Random selection of three states from the North Central region.
- Stage 2: Purposive selection of two LGAs from each state based on disability association activity.
- Stage 3: Random selection of respondents from disability registers.

A total of 428 respondents participated.

3.4 Data Collection Instrument

A structured questionnaire was developed, covering socio-demographic characteristics, educational history, vocational training, and perceived barriers. The instrument was pretested and revised for clarity.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS v25. Descriptive statistics summarized variables, and chi-square tests assessed gender differences in educational attainment and skills acquisition. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

4.0

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1.1 Demographic Characteristics

(Table 1: Demographics of Respondents – reformatted for clarity)

4.1.2 Gender and Educational Attainment

Over half (54.8%) of female respondents had no formal education, compared to 35.6% of males ($\chi^2 = 10.846$, $p = 0.001$), indicating a statistically significant gender disparity.

4.1.3 Gender and Skills Acquisition

Skills acquisition patterns showed gendered segmentation: males dominated technical trades such as welding (22.3%) and mechanics (15.7%), while females were concentrated in tailoring (41.2%) and hairdressing (33.6%) ($\chi^2 = 18.257$, $p < 0.05$).

4.1.4 Barriers to Participation

Key barriers included stigma/discrimination (72.1%), poverty (65.4%), inaccessible infrastructure (54.7%), and lack of assistive devices (43.9%). Women additionally cited gender-specific challenges such as early marriage and domestic responsibilities.

42 . Discussion

Findings confirm the persistence of gender disparities in education and skills acquisition among PWDs in North Central Nigeria, aligning with global evidence that women with disabilities face compounded exclusion (UNESCO, 2020). Cultural norms that prioritize boys' education, coupled with the feminization of poverty, may explain the higher rates of non-school attendance among females.

Gendered skills acquisition patterns reflect both market demand and socio-cultural expectations. While tailoring and hairdressing provide income opportunities, they may offer lower earning potential than male-dominated trades. This segmentation limits women's access to higher-income work and reinforces gendered economic inequalities.

Barriers identified mirror those in previous Nigerian studies (Ajuwon, 2012; Omede, 2015), but this study highlights the interaction between gendered social roles and disability-related barriers. Addressing these requires not only disability-inclusive education policies but also gender-transformative programming.

5.0

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study demonstrates that gender significantly shapes educational and vocational outcomes for PWDs in North Central Nigeria. Female PWDs are more likely to be excluded from formal education and confined to lower-income vocational trades.

5.2 Recommendations:

1. Mainstream gender-sensitive approaches in disability-inclusive education policies.
2. Expand access to technical and high-income vocational skills for women with disabilities.
3. Provide targeted scholarships and incentives for female PWDs to complete schooling.
4. Enforce accessibility standards in schools and training centers.
5. Strengthen community sensitization to challenge stigma and discriminatory norms

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