

STATE OF DISABILITY POLICY ON EMPLOYMENT IN THE UNITED KINGDOM AND NIGERIA (2010-2022)

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Abstract: *This study comparatively examines disability employment policy in the United Kingdom and Nigeria from 2010 to 2022, with particular attention to the availability of anti-discrimination frameworks, the extent of policy implementation, and resulting employment outcomes for persons with disabilities. Although both countries have adopted formal policy and legislative measures aimed at promoting inclusion in the labour market, significant disparities persist in the design, enforcement, and practical effectiveness of these interventions. Using a qualitative comparative research design, the study relies on content analysis of relevant legislation, official policy documents, institutional reports, and secondary statistical evidence, including the United Kingdom's Equality Act 2010 and Nigeria's Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2018. The findings indicate that the United Kingdom has developed a more comprehensive and operational disability employment policy regime, supported by stronger institutional coordination, enforcement mechanisms, and employer-focused inclusion initiatives. By contrast, Nigeria's disability employment framework, while formally progressive, is weakened by limited institutional capacity, poor enforcement, and inadequate policy translation into practice. The study demonstrates that the persistence of the disability employment gap is shaped not merely by the presence of legal provisions, but by the administrative and institutional conditions necessary for effective implementation. It concludes that closing disability employment inequalities in Nigeria requires strengthened institutions, improved enforcement, and a more coherent inclusion strategy informed by comparative policy learning. The article contributes to scholarship in comparative public administration and social policy by foregrounding implementation capacity as a decisive factor in disability policy outcomes.*

Keywords. *Disability policy; employment discrimination; persons with disabilities; policy implementation; comparative public administration; social inclusion; labour market inequality; United Kingdom; Nigeria. ance; electricity utilities; PLS-SEM; Nigeria.*

Introduction

In most countries of the world, policy-makers, particularly ministers formulate and implement policies that tend to address the healthcare, education, job, and social welfare needs of persons with disabilities (Araya, 2018), this is because of the desiring need to ensure they promote and maintain a healthy and comfortable life among people of a state. All around the world, a good number of people live with one form of disability or another. The United Nations (2022) reported that about 80 percent of persons with disabilities are found in developing nations one of which is

Nigeria; this means that the disability policy should be more effective in Africa. For instance, the 2006 National Population Census estimated the population of persons with disabilities to be about 4.8 million Nigerians. This number has increased significantly. Persons living with a disability (PWD) as defined by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities entails “persons who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (UNCRPWD, 2023). These impairments make it difficult for them to have equal and access to services like education, healthcare, employment, social amenities among others.

Over the years, governments, institutions, and policy-makers worldwide including the United Kingdom and Nigeria have made concerted efforts at formulating policies and legislations to provide social welfare services for people with disabilities. Several policy measures were introduced with the aim of eliminating all forms of discrimination against PWD to ensure they gain access to all forms of public goods and services (World Health Organization, 2018). In the United Kingdom, government and policy-makers introduced policies and legislation. Over the years, the country has demonstrated commitment to ensuring that all citizens and residents of the UK and Britain, in General, live free from discrimination and harassment, particularly persons with disabilities (Barnes, 2022). The enactment of the Disability Discrimination Act by the Conservatives addresses the welfare and all forms of discrimination against persons with disabilities (Barnes, 2022). Subsequently, the 1995 Act amendment formed the foundation for the Equality Act of 2010 which reformed the state of disability in the UK and aimed at improving access to educational opportunities, healthcare services, housing services, and employment opportunities among others for PWDs.

Nigerian government since independence has been battling with providing workable policies to protect and provide for persons with disabilities. This has been the policy thrust of various stakeholders like the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities (NCPWD), and the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development at the federal and state government levels. The establishment of the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management, and Social Development in 2007 was aimed at coordinating all humanitarian affairs in Nigeria including the welfare of people with disabilities.

However, it appears that there is still a disability employment gap in both UK and Nigeria despite the various policy measures introduced over the years. It is argued that persons without disabilities will tend to stigmatize and exclude persons with disabilities (Oliver, and Barnes 2010) and it is the role of the government and policymakers to make policies that will guarantee the social integration of persons with disabilities (WHO, 2018). In the workplace, persons with disabilities are most likely not to secure job opportunities than persons without disabilities (Tingyu 2020). It is also assumed that in the educational sector, persons with disabilities are not like to have equal access to education compared to persons with disabilities so as to have opportunities for gainful employment in terms of health; persons with disabilities are mostly denied adequate medical care which would enable them to keep fit for their jobs owing largely to the stigmatization (Barton, 2021). Nigeria seems not to have an effective policy on the skills development of people living with disabilities to make them employable or more productive in businesses and employment. Government, agencies, businesses, and private sector organizations also tend to discriminate against people with disabilities on the account that they constitute a burden and may be inefficient in work performance (Mina, 2013). It is against this background that it is imperative to compare

the state of disability policy on employment in the United Kingdom and Nigeria between 2010 and 2022.

Policy Statement: What Policy Makers Say about Disability Employment

In terms of the policy statement of Nigerian disability stakeholders, James David Lalu, the Executive Secretary of the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities said:

“What we want to achieve is to make Nigeria a country that is comfortable for PWD by ending discrimination and providing an adequate reporting system. Our vision is an inclusive society where rights, privileges, aspiration, development, and equality of employment opportunities of persons with disabilities are guaranteed in line with the provisions of the Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2018.” (NCPWD, 2022 <http://ncpwd.gov.ng/>)

The Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management, and Social Development is the ministry charged with disability policy formulation and implementation in Nigeria. One of the policy objectives of the Minister is to formulate and implement policies and guidelines as appropriate for the employment, and social development of persons with disabilities (FMHDSD, 2022). In terms of jobs, the policy objectives of NCPWD is to “make available not less than 5% of the workforce to qualified persons with disabilities” In terms of education, the Commission aims at “establishing and promoting inclusive schools, vocational and rehabilitation centers for the development of persons with disabilities and facilitate the procurement of scholarship award for persons with disabilities up to university level” (NCPWD, 2022). Despite the existence of these policies and legislations in Nigeria, it seems that PWDs still experience difficulties accessing employment among others unlike what seems to be obtainable in the United Kingdom (Oynintonyo, Robert, and Uzobo, 2018).

The Rationale for Disability Employment Policy Research

The state of disability policies in developed and developing countries has become a source of concern among researchers around the world. This is spurred by the perceived challenges faced by persons living with disabilities in accessing social amenities, and other basic necessities of life, especially with respect to employment. It is argued that developed countries have more inclusive policies that take care of persons with disabilities which seem to be in sharp contrast to the experience in developing nations like Nigeria where PWDs suffer a high volume of discrimination, especially in the workplace (Bangkok, Posarac, & Vick, 2013).

The UK Government has been showing concerted efforts in creating a society that works for everyone, where all are included, and eliminating barriers so that everyone can participate in society (Barnes, 2022). Despite these efforts, the UK is also criticized for still discriminating against disabled people though, or at least for not having achieved equality. For instance, it was reported by Powel (2022) that in October-December 2020, the rate of employment for people with disabilities was 52.3% whereas the rate of employment for people without disabilities was 81.1%, meaning that the gap was 28.8%. This shows that there is a high employment gap that still exists in the UK for people with disabilities. It implies that not all people with disabilities have access to employment opportunities as well as other social services in the United Kingdom at the moment. This explains why the UK Government has been introducing more policies and reviewing existing ones to increase equality and inclusiveness. Despite the efforts of the government to get disabled

people to work, it has been argued that some of these persons with disabilities have not had employment opportunities. Existing policies seem unable to take care of the existing disability employment gap in countries of the world including the UK and Nigeria (Dunn, and Burcaw, 2013).

In Nigeria, there is a poor quality of institutions that have the capacity to fully implement disability policies and legislation. For instance, there exists the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities with this sole mandate. Unfortunately, despite their existence, persons with disabilities still experience discrimination and exclusion from basic services like jobs, education, and health. What Ministers say about disabilities tends to differ significantly from what Ministers actually do especially in developing nations like Nigeria. This agitates the mind of the researcher to find out what they say, what they actually do, and the reasons why differences exist in the state of disability policies in the United Kingdom and Nigeria. The argument is that what Ministers say about disability and what they actually do about disabilities are supposed to be targeted towards social integration of the persons with disabilities and eliminating all forms of discrimination against them. However, there seems to be a disparity in what Ministers say and do about persons with disabilities in developed nations like the United Kingdom as compared to what is obtainable in Nigeria. This forms the motivating concern of this research.

Research Questions

This research is therefore poised with the following questions:

1. What are the policies available for the prohibition of discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment in the United Kingdom and Nigeria?
2. What is the extent of implementation of the policies prohibiting discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment in the United Kingdom and Nigeria?

Significance of Disability Policy Research

The significance of research on disability policies cannot be overemphasized. Understanding issues and challenges faced by persons with disabilities, especially with respect to employment is achievable through disability research. The study when concluded will be of immense significance in understanding the policies available for the prohibition of discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment in the United Kingdom and Nigeria. This is in view of the fact that persons with disabilities seem to suffer from various forms of social exclusion including in such areas as education, skill acquisition, finding employment opportunities as well as discrimination within the workplace. It will help the Nigerian government and other disability policy actors in the country to gain insight into the state of disability policy in the United Kingdom and transfer such knowledge and idea to the development of a more inclusive disability policy on employment in Nigeria.

The findings of the study will also help in understanding how persons with disabilities are currently being treated in the labour market in Nigeria and in the United Kingdom. It will help to ascertain the strength and weaknesses of the disability policies in both countries especially in the area of implementation.

Statement of Hypotheses

The following hypotheses stated in their alternate form were formulated to guide the research.

HA1: There are employment differences among persons with disability in the United Kingdom and Nigeria.

HA2: There are differences in policies available for the prohibition of discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment in the United Kingdom and Nigeria.

HA3: There are differences in the implementation of the policies prohibiting discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment in the United Kingdom and Nigeria.

HA4: There are differences in job restrictions for persons with disability in the United Kingdom and Nigeria.

Literature Review

Conceptual Models of Disability

There are varying definitions of disability by various scholars, institutions, agencies, and countries as influenced by their various socio-political, ideological, and cultural orientations. Persons living with a disability (PWD) as defined by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities entails “persons who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (UNCRPWD, 2023). In the United Kingdom, disability is perceived from a social context where it is argued that it is the society that disables a person and not the impairment (Barton, 2021). In the UK Tingyu (2020) argued that discrimination from society disables a person, not the physical or mental impairment. For this reason, scholars make a case for inclusivity, equality, and rights protection for all. This accounts for why the concept of “disabled persons” is used instead of persons with disabilities as used in Nigeria. In Nigeria, persons with disability are perceived from physical and biological perspectives. In an attempt to respect the dignity of persons with disability, the government, through its agency, National Commission on Persons with Disabilities (2022) refers to them with their inherent forms of disabilities and does not see their disability as being caused by anyone or societal factors. In support of this view, Barnes (2022) argued that it is natural that some persons are born with one form of impairment or the other and these impairments tend to limit their opportunities in life aspirations. The effort to give a comprehensive view of disability was made by the Nigerian Government in the Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act (2018:2) where it was stated that a person with disabilities entails:

“(a) A person who has received a Temporary or Permanent Certificate of Disability over conditions that are expected to continue permanently or for a considerably long period of time which can be reasonably expected to limit the person’s functional ability substantially, but not limited to seeing, hearing, thinking, ambulating, climbing, descending, lifting, grasping, rising, and includes any related functions or any limitation due to weakness or significantly decreased endurance so that he cannot perform his everyday routine, living and working without significantly increased hardship and vulnerability to everyday obstacles and hazards; and(b) a person with long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”

Overall, disability is typically used to describe the physical or mental disorders, or impairment experienced by an individual or population which poses some form of limitations or hindrances in

the capacity of the person to perform optimally or experience difficulty in daily living (FMHDS, 2022). From the foregoing, various forms of disability abound. There are people with hearing impairment. These are people or persons who have difficulty in hearing or cannot hear at all. They are usually referred to as people with hearing impairment (NCPWD, 2022). Secondly, there are individuals or persons who have a speaking impairment. Such people usually have difficulty in talking or cannot talk at all. They are usually called people with speaking impairment. Thirdly, some individuals have difficulty seeing. Such individuals have issues with their sight or cannot see at all. They are regarded as people with visual impairment. Fourthly, some other individuals have difficulty walking. Such individuals cannot walk with either or both of their legs. There are those who are able to move only with the aid of a walking instrument or moving machine. On some occasions, they are permanently bedridden (National Council on People with Disabilities, 2022). There are other individuals who have mental issues. Some suffer from amnesia, psychological disorder, or other forms of mental health challenges. Owing to such impairment, they are not in their best mental state of health. The instances are numerous and abound. Some institutions, scholars, or countries like Nigeria conceptualize such individuals as persons with disabilities.

In an attempt to accommodate the social and medical dimensions in the definition of disability, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, (2022) disability entails “limitations or loss of opportunities to take full participation in normal life with other members of a community or society on equal footing due to physical or social barriers”. Inherent in the definition above is that disability may be caused by social barriers such as discrimination, exclusion, and not necessarily physical impairment. As such, one cannot talk of disability without taking cognizance of the social and environmental contexts that place additional burdens on the life of persons living with one form of impairment or the other.

This study adopted the concept of persons with disabilities as a model that captures the varying forms of disabilities experienced by individuals as well as the social burden placed on them as a result of social barriers. It is also a model being used in Nigeria where the outcome of this research is expected to have the utmost utility.

Brief Statistics of Disability and Employment Outcomes in the United Kingdom

In recent times, it seems that the United Kingdom has been making more efforts to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities. The UK’s goal is to see one million more disabled people in employment by 2027 such that between 2017 and 2019, the number of disabled people in employment increased by 404,000 as of the first quarter of 2019. Furthermore, at the end of 2019, 3.9 million working-age disabled people were in employment in the UK (Tomlinson, 2019). The government engages the services of employment advisers and counselors who would be offering therapeutic services for people with mild mental health issues and making them fit into their work environment. In doing this, the government partnered with the National Health Services (NHS) England to carry out regular tests and provide Individual Placement and Support systems that can improve the health and job performance of people with mental health conditions (Barnes, 2022). In 2019, the UK Government launched the Disability Confident Scheme to encourage employers, especially in private sector organizations to hire, develop and retain people with disabilities. It is reported that about 12000 employers in the private sector had joined the scheme as of May 2019 and the number has grown tremendously today (Tomlinson, 2019). In the same vein, the UK Office for Disability Issues, Department of Works and Pension in its 2019 Disability Progress Report asserted that the government of the United Kingdom has been working with various agencies including the Maynard Taskforce to encourage skill acquisition and

apprenticeship for people living with disabilities (UK Office for Disability Issues, 2019). In Scotland for instance, there is Equalities Action Plan for an apprenticeship which was published in 2015 by Skills Development Scotland (UK Office for Disability Issues, 2019). More so, the Welsh Government in December 2018 formulated its own skill acquisition policy termed Inclusive Apprenticeships Disability Action Plan, which aimed to remove barriers for people with disabilities trying to acquire one skill or another (UK Office for Disability Issues, 2019).

Brief Statistics of Disability and Employment Outcomes in Nigeria

There appears to be a higher disability employment gap in Nigeria. The government itself has not made a significant effort to create jobs for the disabled. Researchers argue that prior to the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria, there was 28.1% disability employment gap in Nigeria. In essence, as of 2019, while the rate of employment for persons with disability of working age stood at 54.1%, the rate of employment for persons without disability stood at 82.2% leaving a wide gap of 28.1% (NCPWD, 2022). Furthermore, in the 2022 Persons with Disabilities Day Celebration, the Nigerian Government announced that only about 161 persons with disabilities were employed in the federal public service in 2020 out of the total 18000 jobs created in the public sector alone in the year (NCPWD, 2022). The above data points to a high level of discrimination, inequality, and exclusion of people with disabilities in Nigeria.

Disability Policy: A Critical Discourse

Government policy is what a government at any point in time chooses to do or not to do, it is the integrated courses and programs of action that the government has set and the framework or guides it has designed to direct actions and practices in certain problem areas (Tummers, 2012). Governments formulate policies in various sectors of the economy in order to address diverse issues and this is why governments of the world make and have policies that aim at the social integration, development, and growth of people with disabilities (Barnes, 2022). Most developing nations like Nigeria, among others, oftentimes lack the political integrity to make and implement policies to achieve desired results and this is why most often, they make policies that lack effectiveness in terms of implementation and maintenance as may be seen in developed nations like the United Kingdom, United States of America, and France among others (Bangkok, Posarac, & Vick, 2013).

Similarly, poor implementation of disability policies tends to account for the differences in the state of disability protection in developed and developing nations. The policies on the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities, the policies on the Education of Persons with Disabilities, and the policies on Barrier-Free Medical Facilities as well as job opportunities in developing nations are most times not adequately enforced (Bangkok, Posarac, & Vick, 2013).

Governments, institutions, and policy-makers worldwide including the United Kingdom and Nigeria take some actions or inactions to provide social welfare services for people with disabilities. Such actions or inactions are referred to as disability policy (Barnes, 2022). It is noteworthy that not all policies aimed at disabled people advance their rights, in some cases; some of the policies restrict their rights in employment and other social services. Overall, policies are made by the government through legislation covering persons with different forms of disabilities with respect to education, employment, healthcare, marriage, politics, and social welfare services among others (Mina, 2013).

In terms of employment, disability policies are conscious efforts, actions, and provisions made by governments and agencies in an attempt to prohibit discrimination of persons on the basis of disability with respect to matters pertaining to employment, promotion, occupational safety, and working conditions (Bangkok, Posarac, & Vick, 2013). Disability policies aim to safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities on equal footing with others to fair and favorable working conditions including protection from harassment and redress of grievances.

For instance, the UK promoted the development of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD); and was one of the first signatory nations (United Nations 2022). In other countries like the Philippines, the United States of America, Japan, France, and China among others, governments and policymakers have made a significant effort to introduce policies and laws that prohibit discrimination against persons with disabilities, especially in terms of employment. For instance, in the Philippines like some other developed nations, there have been various policies the government introduced for persons with disabilities. Some of them are the Tulong Alalay sa Taong May Kapansanan (TULAY) policy otherwise called Support Services for Persons with Disabilities by the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) aimed at providing social support like education, skills acquisition, and employment among others for PWDs (Mina, 2013). There is also the Assistance Package for Persons with Disabilities of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) which is aimed at improving the entrepreneurial capabilities of the PWDs. Also, the Philippine National Skills Competition for persons with disabilities of Technical, Education specifically engage in massive skills development for the PWDs and provides special grants to help them (Mina, 2013). Similar to this is the establishment of the Skills Development Authority (TESDA) for the purpose of skill acquisition and development among them; Science and Technology Intervention for the Poor, the Vulnerable, and PWDs of the Department of Science and Technology (DOST); among others (Mina, 2013). In the United States of America, one of the foremost anti-discrimination policies against the employment of persons with disabilities is the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 which was amended in 2008. The Act has been protecting the rights of PWDs and preventing any form of discrimination against them in terms of recruitment, work environment, and compensation by both public and private institutions. However, it is arguable that the US like other nations have not achieved equality hence, there are still some forms of discrimination against persons with disabilities in accessing public services (National Council on Disability, 2007).

It is argued that the participation of persons with disabilities in education, work, social life, and healthcare informed the disability policies and legislations in the United Kingdom and Nigeria as well as other countries of the world (Brown, 2002). This is because, the stigmatization and discrimination against people with disabilities in public and private organizations, social services, as well as public facilities lead to a sense of exclusion and relegation among the persons living with disabilities (Dunn, and Burcaw, 2013). Persons who are not experiencing any form of disability are more likely not to have a good association with people with disabilities. Arguing along the same line, Tingyu (2020) was of the view that there is a tendency for persons with some forms of impairment to be avoided or coldly related with by persons without any form of impairment especially in a work setting thereby causing social integration issues. If this is the case, it leads to exclusion, despair, pain, and feeling of rejection among persons with disabilities. As such, the government makes and is expected to initiate policies that aim to integrate PWDs into every facet of societal life. It was on this premise that institutions like the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities were established in Nigeria to provide for and protect the needs of the PWDs under the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management, and Social

Development. Legislations like the Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2018 and Equality Act 2010 were introduced in Nigeria and UK respectively.

Challenges Faced by Persons with Disabilities in the Employment

There abound, several encumbrances faced by persons with disabilities in the course of securing employment or even in keeping the job (NCPWD, 2022). In some cases, persons with disabilities are paid lesser than their counterparts who are without disabilities and this amounts to discrimination in the workplace (Xu, 2012). In other cases, they are maltreated, prejudiced, and stereotyped by both the employer and co-workers. These are some of the issues that disability policies on employment are formulated to checkmate. It is argued that PWDs oftentimes face stigmatization from fellow employees, especially in a case where their type of disability is easily noticeable such as being, blind, or amputated or difficulty in walking (Tingyu, 2020). The result is that such people are isolated and avoided by their contemporaries. This could be traumatic for them in the workplace (Barnes, 2022).

More so, persons with disabilities face serious challenges with access to education. Owing to their disabilities, they do not have equal access to educational opportunities and this in turn affects their ability to secure gainful employment (World Health Organization, 2020). In some cases, they face challenges with studying professional courses like medicine, law, accountancy, engineering, and the rest which are lucrative. In such a situation, they are limited to few opportunities in arts and humanities courses with limited employment potential. For instance, it is rare to find a blind person who studied Medicine and Surgery, Petrochemical Engineering, Architecture, and Electrical Engineering among others; they usually study courses like law, management, psychology, sociology, and education among other humanities (Oynintonyo, Robert, and Uzobo, 2018). While on the job, few PWDs who have already been employed face challenges with on-the-job and off-the-job training and development programs that could guarantee their career advancement (World Health Organization, 2018). In a situation where they are unable to access training and development opportunities, they are stagnated in the workplace. This situation raises eyebrows as to the state of disability in addressing these discriminations and challenges.

Furthermore, there is this bias employers have against PWDs. For some employers, employing a person who has any form of disability is already a stepping stone towards business failure with the assumption that such people will not work effectively and efficiently (United Nations, 2022). Judging by their disability, there is already a feeling that they cannot perform and as such, should not be hired. On one hand, employers often have prejudice in employing persons with disabilities and as such, tend not to recruit many of them. In this case, they do not enjoy equal employment opportunities. On the other hand, it is arguable that persons with disabilities may not be efficient in doing certain jobs especially those requiring physical abilities to perform (Oynintonyo, Robert, and Uzobo, 2018). For instance, it is near impossible in Nigeria and to an extent in the UK to employ a blind person as a site engineer because he may not be able to supervise and discharge the responsibilities of a site engineer efficiently.

Institutional Capacity and Disability Employment Policy Implementation: Why Policies Fail in Developing Countries

Researchers have argued that institutional capacity tends to account for the differences in the policy performance of developing and developed nations (Dunn, and Burcaw, 2013). Nations with strong institutions like the UK, France, Germany, the United States of America, and China among others tend to achieve better results in their policy implementation process when compared to developing nations like Nigeria and the rest of Africa (Marizaura, Natali and Ciro, 2017). It is the quality of

institutions that determines the extent to which the objectives of a given policy will be achieved. Strong institutions defy social, cultural, and environmental variables that interfere with the policy process. Many countries especially developing nations like Nigeria formulate good policies, especially with respect to the prohibition of discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment but end up not implementing them effectively. Poor implementation of disability employment policies in such countries tends to defeat the objectives of such policies as they end up not yielding the desired results. For instance, in Nigeria, the Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act (2018) was aimed at safeguarding the rights to employment for persons with disabilities and eliminating all forms of discrimination against them. Unfortunately, persons living with disabilities seem to still suffer a whole lot of discrimination in the workplace. In both public and private sector organizations, they are not given equal employment opportunities and in some cases where they are employed, they suffer discrimination (Brown, 2002). Such a situation points to the quality of institutional capacity inherent in the country in checkmating discrimination against persons with disabilities especially with respect to employment.

According to Panday (2017) bureaucracy and politics inevitably enter the picture. He maintained that different institutional structures and devices have been designed in order to control the actions of bureaucrats, aligning them with the objectives set by democratically elected politicians. The influence of political patronage on the quality of policy has varied dimensions such that implementers are compelled to serve the needs of the political elites (Shahada, 2016). Where political consideration, poor institutions, lack of political will, corruption, and poor monitoring and evaluation undermine disability policy objectives, there will be ineffectiveness in the provision of services to persons with disabilities thereby causing a difference between what ministers say and what they actually do about disability inclusion.

Theoretical Assumptions on Disability Policy

Most people with disabilities strive for equality in employment opportunities as well as other public and social services (Inglehart, 2008). Arguably, having access to social services and employment is a survival need for some disabled people, indeed a human right, as they can otherwise not feed themselves and live a decent life. They feel the need to take an active part in the society to which they belong and have their voices heard. Sometimes, they lack basic needs like food, shelter, water, clothing, and so forth. Disabled people are much more likely to live in poverty, even in the UK, and not be able to meet basic needs compared to non-disabled people (Abrahamson, 2011). Discrimination in public services, the private sector, businesses, and the political arena tends to affect their social inclusion and acceptability of self-awareness. Therefore, most policymakers across the globe tend to fashion out policies that could eliminate discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment as a means of social inclusion and equality (Barton, 2021).

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design. The adoption of the qualitative design was hinged on the need to collect non-numerical data contained in policy documents of Nigeria and the United Kingdom pertaining to disability policy on employment. An in-depth comparison was done and lessons were drawn from the experiences in both countries.

Sources of Disability Employment Policy Data

Data were collected from primary sources. I collated various disability policy documents and statistical bulletins of Nigeria and the United Kingdom based on their achievements and shortcomings.

Specifically, the policy document of the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management, and Social Development, National Commission for Persons with Disabilities, UK Ministry for Disabled People, Health and Work, Legislation like the Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2018 and Equality Act 2010 and the various annual reports on the performance of these policies and agencies were reviewed. This provided an opportunity to utilize the case analysis method to review the state of disability policies on employment operated by the two countries under study. Inferences were drawn on their implications for welfare development in Nigeria.

Disability Employment Policy Data Analysis Method

The researcher adopted the content analysis method in data analysis (White and Marsh, 2006). This method is used to analyze content and its features. Researchers use the content analysis approach to critically analyze the theme and features of data, texts, ideas, or presentations in the form of critical thinking (White and Marsh, 2006). The researcher adopted a qualitative approach to reviewing data on the subject of research. Through content analysis, the study identified and analyzed available data on the disability employment gap in the UK and Nigeria, examined the various policies prohibiting discrimination against persons with disabilities in the UK and Nigeria as well as the extent of implementation of available policies prohibiting discrimination against persons with disabilities in the UK and Nigeria. Statistics, graphs, and charts were utilized in the analysis for objectivity in the results.

Disability Policy as an Interesting Empirical Discourse

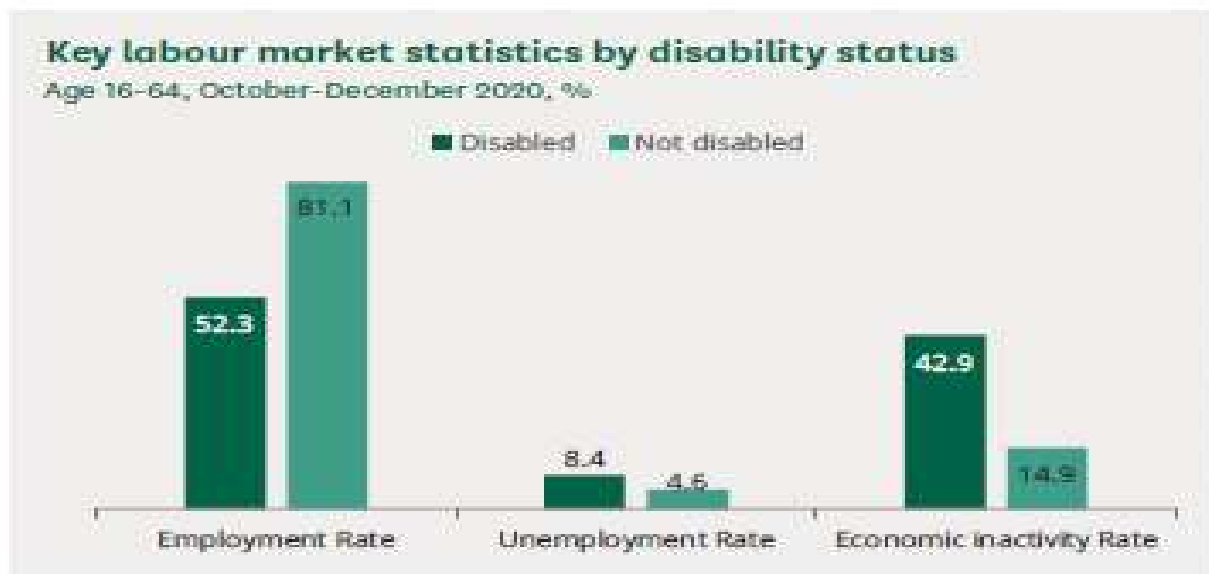
It is an interesting empirical strategy to compare the state of disability policy on employment in the United Kingdom and Nigeria because, it will help in revealing the quality of policy process in developed nations like the United Kingdom and draw empirical lessons that can be applied in improving policy process for social equality, inclusion, and rights protection in developing nations like Nigeria. One can borrow a leaf from how disability policies on employment have worked in the UK and apply the same in Nigerian settings. Issues that impede the inclusion, and equality of people with disabilities in accessing basic social welfare services especially employment and skill development in Nigeria can be solved through this empirical study.

Data Analysis

Statistics of Disability and Employment Outcomes in the United Kingdom

Available data shows that the United Kingdom has been making more efforts to get more disabled persons into employment through the formulation and implementation of various disability employment policies. Starting from the year 2013, through to the Covi-19 pandemic era of 2020, there has been positive growth in statistics of disability employment in the UK thereby reducing the disability employment gap in the country (Powell, 2022). The UK set a goal to employ over one million more disabled people by 2027. The goal was pursued vigorously such that between 2017 and 2019, the number of disabled people in employment increased by 404,000 as of the first quarter of 2019 (Barnes, 2022). Furthermore, at the end of 2019, 3.9 million working-age disabled people were in employment in the UK (Tomlinson, 2019).

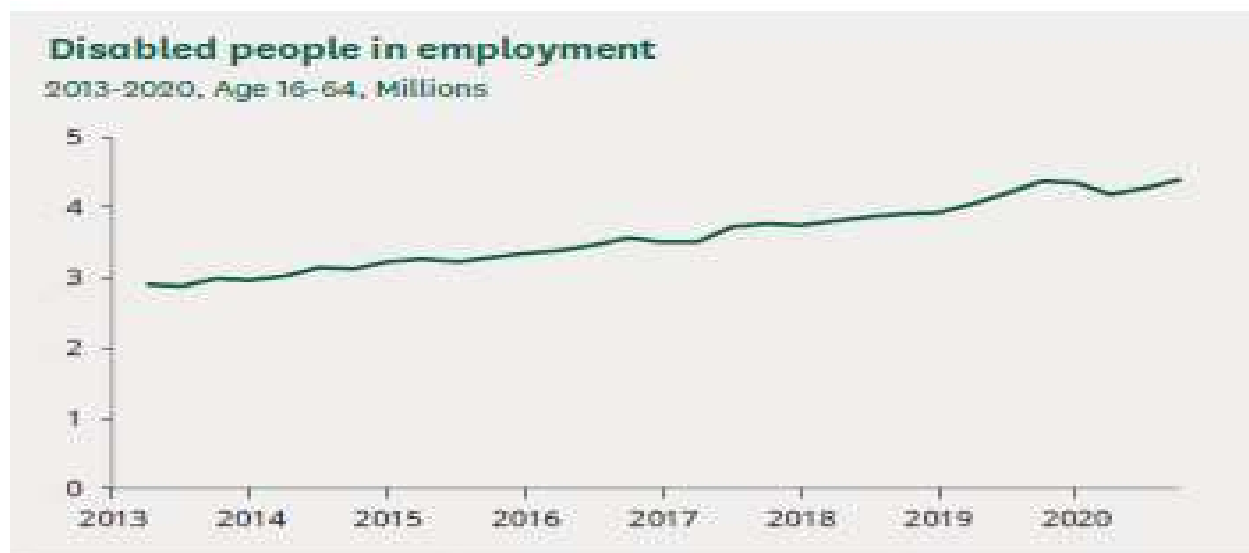
Powel, (2021) revealed that in the year 2020, statistics showed that 8.4 million persons, representing 20% of the working-age population (between 16-64 years of age) reported being disabled. Out of this number, about 4.4 million of them were employed, representing an increase of 25,000 from the figure in 2019, which is relatively poor compared to the overall 8.4 million disability unemployment population. As affirmed by Powel (2022:3), “of the 8.4 million persons with disabilities of working age, 4.4million (53.6%) are currently in work and this compares to 81.7% of those who are not disabled, and the unemployment rate of disabled people was 8.4% when compared to 4.6% for those without disabilities”. This shows disability employment gap still exists since 52.3% of disabled persons were in employment in 2020, a decline from 54.1% in 2019, and the employment rate for persons without disabilities was 81.1%, a decrease from 82.2% in 2020 and 2019 respectively as reported by (Powell, 2022). This is represented in Figure 1 below:



Source: Powel (2021).

Figure 1: Key Labour Market Statistics by disability status in the UK in 2020.

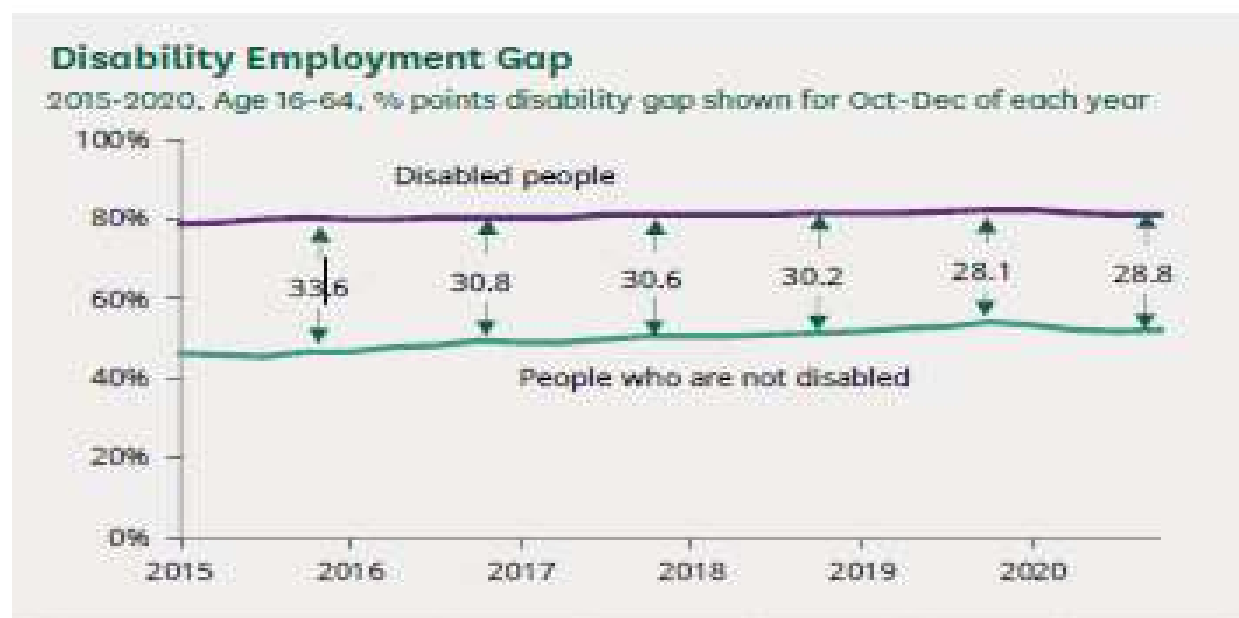
From Figure 1 above, it can be seen that 3.6 million (42.9%) persons with disabilities of working age were not economically active in the year 2020. This was mainly due to the effect of the Covid-19 Pandemic. This is because; the number of PWDs in employment has been on the increase between 2013 and 2020 as shown in figure 2 below:



Source: Powel (2021).

Figure 2: Disability Employment Statistics in the UK in 2013-2020

In terms of disability employment gap statistics, Powel (2022) further revealed that as of December 2020, the employment rate of disabled persons was 52.3% and the rate for persons without disabilities was 81.1% which means a gap of 28.8%. Furthermore, “within the period of October-December 2013 and October to December 2020, the disability employment gap declined by 4.9%” (Powel, 2022:5) as shown in Figure 3 below:



Source: Powel (2021).

Figure 3: Disability Employment Gap in the UK (2015-2020)

The figure above shows that in 2015, the disability employment gap was 33.6%, in 2016, it declined by 3% to 30.8%; in 2017, it declines by 0.2% to 30.6%; in 2018, data further declined by 0.4% to 30.2%; and in 2019, it significantly declined by 1.9% to 28.1% (Barnes, 2022). However,

there was a slight increase of about 0.7% in 2020 to 28.8%. It is inferred that the decline in the disability employment gap over the years as shown in the table above is linked to the policy efforts of the UK Government in getting more persons with disabilities to work and removing all forms of discrimination against PWDs in employment in the country.

In 2022, as of September, the number of disabled persons in employment increased to 4.9 million and the disability employment rate increased by 52.6% (Powell, 2022). However, this rate shows a gap of 29.8% when compared to the 82.5% employment rate for non-disabled persons in the UK in the same year (Khan et al, 2018).

Statistics of Disability and Employment Outcomes in Nigeria

There appears to be a higher disability employment gap in Nigeria (Leonard 2018). In 2015, a UNDP report revealed that about 60% of Nigerians with disabilities were unemployed whereas only about 5% had access to economic activities (Thompson, 2020). In 2018, the rate of youth (25 years old) disability unemployment in Nigeria was 77.3% whereas the unemployment rate for youths without disability was 49.2% (Arimoro, 2019; Thompson, 2020). Furthermore, the rate of adult (26-64 years old) disability unemployment in Nigeria was 62.5% whereas the unemployment rate for adults without a disability was 21.5% in the same year 2018 (Thompson, 2020). In 2019, it was reported that out of the 15789 jobs created in the public and private sectors in Nigeria, only 69 persons with disabilities got job opportunities and this data is less than the 5% quota provided in the policy guideline of the Federal Government of Nigeria provided for in the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2018 (Etieyibo, 2020). Similarly, in 2019, out of the total of 17400 jobs created in Nigeria, only 103 opportunities were given to persons with disabilities in employment (Etieyibo, 2020). This also is less than the 5% quota provided in the Federal Government of Nigeria policy guideline provided for in the Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2018 (Etieyibo, 2020). The government itself has not made a significant effort to create jobs for the disabled (Eleweke and Ebenso 2016). Researchers argue that before the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria; there was a 28.1% disability employment gap in Nigeria. In essence, as of 2019, while the rate of employment for persons with disability of working age stood at 24.1%, the rate of employment for persons without disability stood 82.2% leaving a wide gap of 58.1% (NCPWD, 2022). Furthermore, in the 2022 Persons with Disabilities Day Celebration, the Nigerian Government announced that only about 161 persons with disabilities were employed in the federal public service in 2020 out of the total 180.00 jobs created in the public sector alone in the year (NCPWD, 2022). The above data points to a high level of discrimination, inequality, and exclusion of people with disabilities in Nigeria.

Policies Available for the Prohibition of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities in Employment in the United Kingdom

One of the most significant policy measures set up to prohibit discrimination against persons with disabilities especially in employment in the UK is the Equality Act 2010 (Powel, 2022). The Act prohibits any form of direct or indirect discrimination against PWDs in employment and recruitment processes. The Equality Act 2010 is the primary policy legal framework regulating the rights of persons with disabilities in the UK (UK Office for Disability Issues, 2019). The Act replaced several legislations and policies like the Equal Pay Act of 1970, the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975, the Race Relations Act, of 1976, the Disability Discrimination Act of 1995, the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations of 2003, Employment Equality (Sexual

Orientation) Regulations 2003, Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006, Equality Act 2006 and the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007. All these legislations were repealed and consolidated by the Equality Act 2010 (Barnes, 2022).

In 2013, “the Government of the United Kingdom launched the disability and health employment policy strategy aimed at reforming employment support for disabled people and those with health conditions” (Equality and Human Rights Commission, UK, 2023:41). In this program, a number of policies were introduced such as Work Choice policy which offered a three-level specialist employment help for persons with disabilities to include; work entry, in-work support for up to two years, and longer-term in-work support (Barnes, 2022). There was also the Access to Work Policy which involves a publicly-funded employment support program providing practical and financial support for people who have a disability. It was reported that between 2013 and 2014, about 108 million pounds were spent on the Access to Work Policy to help 35,540 people with disabilities enter or remain in the work (Barnes, 2022). In the same year, the Government of the United Kingdom introduced the Disability Confident Scheme to support employers to open up work opportunities for persons with disabilities. The aim was to help employers become more and more confident in recruiting and retaining persons with disabilities in their organizations (Powel, 2022).

“In November 2016, the Government of the United Kingdom released a Green Paper titled ‘Work, Health, and Disability: Improving Lives’ aimed at improving support for persons with disabilities, exploring the roles of employers, reducing the disability employment gap, and promoting integration across health and employment” (UK Office for Disability Issues, 2019). This policy elaborated the government’s efforts at increasing the disability employment rate in the country. In Scotland for instance, there is Equalities Action Plan for an apprenticeship which was published in 2015 by Skills Development Scotland (UK Office for Disability Issues, 2019). More so, the Welsh Government in December 2018 formulated its own skill acquisition policy termed Inclusive Apprenticeships Disability Action Plan, which aimed to remove barriers for people with disabilities trying to acquire one skill or another (UK Office for Disability Issues, 2019).

Policies Available for the Prohibition of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities in Employment in Nigeria

There are several policy guidelines available for the prohibition of discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment in Nigeria. The major policy document however is the Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2018. Part VI, Sections 28 to 30 of the Act provide for opportunities for employment and participation in politics and public life by persons with disabilities in Nigeria (Etieyibo, 2020). Section 28 of the Act covers the equal right to work, section 29 covers opportunity for employment and section 30 provides for participation in politics by persons with disabilities. Section 28 provides that:

“(1) a person with a disability has the right to work on an equal basis with others and this includes the right to an opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open; (2) a person who contravenes subsection (1), commits an offense and is liable on conviction to nominal damages of a minimum of N250,000 payable to the affected person with a disability; (3) where a company contravenes subsection (1); the company commits an offense and is liable to nominal damages of a minimum of N500,000 payable to the affected person with a disability; and any principal officer of the company involved in the violation is liable to N50,000 damages payable to the payable to the affected person

with a disability” (The Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2018:11).

In Section 29, the Act further provided that “all employers of labour in public organizations shall, as much as possible, have persons with disabilities constituting at least 5% of their employment” (The Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2018:11).

Furthermore, the government through the Act in Part II Sections 31 to 39 provides for the establishment of the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities to ensure the implementation of the policy and prohibition of all forms of discrimination against PWDs.

The Extent of Implementation of the Policies Prohibiting Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities in Employment in Nigeria

It has been observed that there is a high level of discrimination against persons with disabilities in Nigeria especially in terms of employment (JONAPWD, 2017). This point to failures in the implementation of existing anti-discrimination policies established in the country. Etieyibo (2020) revealed that “persons with disabilities are discriminated against in employment in Nigeria due to poor institutional capacity to implement the existing anti-discrimination policies and legislations. A case in point is that of “David Okon who was demoted from the position of a Bank Training Manager to a Telephone Operator due to his disabilities” (Etieyibo, 2020:71). Instances of the experiences of persons with disabilities interviewed and reported by Etieyibo (2020:71-72) show that there exist discriminations against persons with disabilities in many organizations in Nigeria. One such experience is highlighted thus:

“Before I got this job, I applied to several companies because I made first class in my B.Sc. Any organization that sees my CV will want to invite me for an interview, but once I get to the company, they will tell me that they do not have a job for people like me. Once, I was invited for an interview. When I got there, while we were waiting for the interview to commence, one of the managers of the company that passed and saw me with my walking stick entered his office and asked one of his staff to invite me to his office. He asked me about my mission and I told him. He then told me that they do not employ people with clutches in their organization” (Etieyibo (2020:71).

The above experience is very gory and speaks volumes of poor implementation of policies against discrimination of PWDs in the workplace in Nigeria. Everyone is meant to have equal to the right of work as provided in the Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2018. “When we reflect on the case of Okon and the victim interviewed and some of the provisions of the Disabilities Act, it is obvious that the right to work and employment of persons with disabilities has been violated especially sections 67 and 68 which prohibits employers from engaging in any form of discrimination against persons with disabilities in the work environment” (Etieyibo, 2020:72). By implication, the established institutions like the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities (NCPWDs) and The Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management, and Social Development (FMHADMSD) have not lived up to expectation in implementation of disability policies in Nigeria.

Implementation of disability policy in developing countries suffers from weak institutional capacity (Ihedioha, 2015). Good disability policies are formulated by the government and in most cases passed into Acts of the parliament and handed down for implementation. In Nigeria, the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities (NCPWDs) and the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management, and Social Development (FMHADMSD) being in charge of disability rights protections show a poor capacity to eliminate discrimination against persons with disabilities in the workplace. They have not been able to enforce the work rights of PWDs in public sector employment not to mention private sector organizations (Holmes 2017). This administrative gap has widened the disability employment gap in the country unlike the performance of institutions in the United Kingdom in the implementation of disability policies (Haruna, 2017).

The Extent of Implementation of the Policies Prohibiting Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities in Employment in the United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has been making concerted efforts to enforce the equal rights act in of 2010 among other disability employment policies in the country. In doing this, the country engaged various stakeholders in the country to ensure that all forms of discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment were resolved.

The UK Government also provided disabled persons with support services to cope within the workplace. The government engages the services of employment advisers and counselors who would be offering therapeutic services for people with mild mental health issues and make them fit into their work environment (UK Office for Disability Issues, 2019). Furthermore, Barnes, (2022:14) revealed that:

“as part of the implementation of the Personal Support Package, an extra 1000 Mental Health Support Service places were announced and this service provides six (6) months of support to start a new job as part of the Access to Work Scheme. Between 2019 and 2020, 7,600 people were approved to receive mental health support as part of the scheme”.

In doing this, the government partnered with the National Health Services (NHS) England to carry out regular tests and provide Individual Placement and Support systems that can improve the health and job performance of people with mental health conditions (Barnes, 2022). In 2019, the UK Government launched and implemented the Disability Confident Scheme to encourage employers, especially in private sector organizations to hire, develop and retain people with disabilities. It is reported that about 12000 employers in the private sector had joined the scheme as of May 2019 and the number has grown tremendously today (Tomlinson, 2019). In the same vein, the UK Office for Disability Issues, Department of Works and Pension in its 2019 Disability Progress Report asserted that the government of the United Kingdom has been working with various agencies including the Maynard Taskforce to encourage skill acquisition and apprenticeship for people living with disabilities (UK Office for Disability Issues, 2019).

In implementing the Access to Work Policy, the UK government provided procured some communication support equipment for interviews of persons with disabilities by employers and for the disabled. There was financial support given to employers of persons with disabilities as

well as the persons with disabilities themselves to encourage their employment. For instance, funds and equipment were provided for 39000 persons with disabilities between 2019 and 2020 by the government.

Furthermore, the government provided transport facilities like vehicles to persons with disabilities employed in various public and private organizations to aid their transportation to work and other places. These measures were all geared toward ensuring that disabled persons have a conducive work experience and are not discriminated against by employees on the basis of such disabilities.

Another effort made to the implementation of policies prohibiting discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment in the United Kingdom was the implementation of the Disability Confident Scheme. The scheme aimed to enable organizations “improve on how they attract, recruit and retain disabled workers and as of March 2021, almost 20,000 employers had signed up to the Scheme” (Powel, 2021: 13). The implementation divided the scheme into three levels; Disability Confident Committed, Disability Confident Employer and Disability Confident Leader (Powel, 2021). Implementation of the disability confident committed was implemented in such a way that an employer is required to agree to a set of Disability Confident Commitments that they will be carrying out within a year of becoming Disability Confident. In the words of Powel (2021), the commitments which employers are required to carry out include:

“inclusive and accessible recruitment, communicating vacancies, offering an interview to persons with disabilities, providing reasonable adjustments, and supporting existing employees who develop disability to stay in the work” (P13).

The UK Office for Disability Issues implements this policy and monitors compliance in public and private organizations across the United Kingdom. The second level implemented is the disability-confident employer. At this level, employers are required to prove that they are actively seeking to attract and employ persons with disabilities, they are required to prove that they support persons with disabilities working within the organization, and they are making necessary improvements where needed. The last level of implementation requires employers to prove that “they encourage and support other employers to become Disability Confident” (Powel, 2021:14). The overall implementation of the Scheme showed an impressive rate of success. For instance, Powel (2021) revealed that:

“of the 19,961 employers that participated in the scheme in July 2020, 15,992 employers representing (80%) were Disability Confident Committed, 3625 employers representing (18%) were Disability Confident Employers whereas 344 employers representing (2%) were Disability Confident Leaders, and all main government departments in the UK are Disability Confident Leaders (p14)”

In essence, an assessment of the implementation of the scheme by the Department for Works and Pensions cited in Powel (2021) revealed that the scheme had a significant positive impact on the employment of PWDs as 50% of surveyed employers reported that they had employed at least a disabled person as a consequence of joining the Scheme. Finally, in an effort to implement the Equality Act (2010) to prevent discrimination against PWDs in employment, the government

introduced the reasonable adjustment requirement from employers to ensure that PWDs overcame any challenges they may experience in doing their jobs and career advancement.

However, notwithstanding the efforts of the government and its institutions in the implementation of anti-discrimination policies to protect persons with disabilities, it is argued that disabled persons do not have equal access to employment with those without disabilities. However, the law strictly prohibits discrimination against any person on the basis of disability right from the application, to interview, job offer, and on the job as it is unlawful and highly frowned upon in the UK.

Summary of Findings

In the course of the study, the following findings as summarized were made:

1. There are employment differences among persons with disabilities in the United Kingdom and Nigeria. Nigeria has a higher employment disability gap than the United Kingdom.
2. There are differences in policies available for the prohibition of discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment in the United Kingdom and Nigeria. The United Kingdom has more comprehensive and inclusive policies and legislations prohibiting discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment than Nigeria. The main policy instrument of the Nigerian Government is the Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2018 which has not achieved its objectives.
3. There are differences in the implementation of the policies prohibiting discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment in the United Kingdom and Nigeria. In Nigeria, there exists, poor institutional capacity to implement the provisions of the Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2018. This is unlike the United Kingdom which has partnered with several institutions and private sector organizations including the provision of financial support to employers of persons with disabilities. This is not the case in Nigeria where the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities has not been effective and efficient in the performance of its core mandate is the implementation of the Act.

Conclusion

The study has shown that the state of disability policies in developed and developing countries differ significantly. The United Kingdom has more inclusive policies that take care of the employment of persons with disabilities which is the opposite of what is obtainable in Nigeria where PWDs suffer a high volume of discrimination, especially in the workplace (Bangkok, Posarac, & Vick, 2013).

The UK Government has shown significant improvement in creating a society that works for the majority of the population (Barnes, 2022). The UK has a lower disability employment gap than Nigeria. Between October-December 2020, the rate of employment for people with disabilities was 52.3% whereas the rate of employment for people without disabilities was 81.1%, meaning that the gap was 28.8%. Unfortunately, in Nigeria, there is a poor quality of institutions that have the capacity to fully implement disability policies and legislation. What Ministers say about disabilities is significantly different from what they actually do. Nigeria has not been able to even achieve the 5% quota for employment of persons with disabilities as provided for in the Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2018.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. There is every need for the government of Nigeria and that of the United Kingdom to make more efforts by creating more job opportunities for persons with disabilities in order to close the disability employment gap in both countries. There is every need for Nigeria to provide more job opportunities for persons with disabilities to close the gap.
2. There is a need for Nigeria to emulate the different policies available for the prohibition of discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment in the United Kingdom. There is a need for the Nigerian Government to increase the 5% quota provided in the Act for employment of persons with disabilities to at least 20%. The quota is not adequate in providing employment opportunities for PWDs in order to close the gap.
3. There is a need for the Nigerian government to ensure effective implementation of the policies prohibiting discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment by providing financial support for employers of persons with disabilities and partnering with private sector organizations in closing the disability employment gap just like the United Kingdom has been doing. The National Commission for Persons with Disabilities in Nigeria should promote skill development for PWDs to increase their employment opportunities. Similarly, work support facilities should be provided for them.

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