

CHAPTER TWENTY NINE

ENHANCING SELF-ADVOCACY SKILLS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Olakunle Akande Iroko
Ayuba Daniel Anyuabaga
Ochigbo Emmanuel Adikwu
School of Post Graduate Studies
University of Jos

Introduction

In the words of (Ralph Waldo Emerson), “To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment.” Every now and then, humans are faced with the pressure to becoming one thing or the other in direct contrast to their personal desires and aspirations. Only a few do withstand the pressure of not conforming to the set-standards, many easily yield in. To the persons without disability, this can be a fierce confrontation to their personality and humanity. To persons with disability, it is an even greater challenge and a heavy burden to bear. This is because, persons with disabilities (PWDs) according to Ozoji (2023) are subjects of devaluation by the society, a position that makes self-advocacy almost unattainable in their lives. A devalued person sees himself as a failure, down and .out; voiceless and a shy personality

Enhancing self-advocacy skills of persons with disabilities is a crucial matter of consideration in our contemporary world today. Consider the numerous physiological needs of an average individual in a society today and one will have an idea on the weight of the needs of persons with disabilities. Imagine a person with disability who is dependent yet cannot communicate his basic needs to his care-giver or peers. That alone compounds the existing problem he/she faces or even, a person with disability who makes an effort to relay his/her problem to an individual but encounters a communication-barrier. This implies double challenge and multiplies the resultant effect of his/her condition hence, the need to enhance self-advocacy skills of persons with disabilities.

Enhancing according to Cambridge Dictionary means to improve the quality, amount, or strength of something. For Merriam-Webster; it means to heighten or increase. Thus, to a layman, enhance is to make better. This entails there is a phenomenon in existence but is now requiring a strengthening or reinforcement due to weakness, impotency or deterioration. In the context of this paper, PWDs have limitations of sorts that impede their capacity for self-expression and enhancement. Something has to be done to them to tackle the limitations and to empower them to brave up, speak up and to advocate for themselves.

Self-Advocacy refers to an individual’s ability to effectively communicate, convey, negotiate or assert his or her own interests, desires, needs and rights. It

involves making informed decisions and taking responsibility for those decisions” (VanReusen et al., 1994, as cited in Santa-Cruz, 2022). It means speaking up for oneself and one’s interest. One of the eleven fundamental human rights globally is the “Right to Freedom of Expression.” A famous quote has it that “you do not primarily need someone to complete you, you primarily need to accept yourself completely.” An individual will not see the need to advocate (speak up) for himself/herself without a personal acceptance of who he/she is. Self-advocacy succeeds self-acceptance and the need to be a voice for oneself. Being aware of oneself, knowing one’s needs and having self-confidence are the very key to self-advocacy.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines a skill as the ability to use one’s knowledge effectively and readily in execution or performance. It is the ability to do something that comes from training, experience or practice. There are several types of skills out there which are prerequisite to performing several functions and tasks. These include but are not limited to job skills, life skills, personal life skills, sport skills, student skills, social skills, inter-personal skills and intra-personal skills. For the sake of this discussion, we will be considering ability/skill(s) for self-advocacy.

Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) is a term used to regard but not limited to those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various attitudinal and environmental barriers, hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. This poses a serious challenge to this category of people and necessitates an action which is self-advocacy. Yet, we cannot talk about self-advocacy without first self-acceptance. A famous quote by Stephen Covey says, “I am not a product of my circumstances. I am a product of my decisions.” Persons with disabilities must come to a stand-point-of-view to decide who they are, what they want to be and not allow their circumstances decide for them. In the words of Marianne Williamson, “Nothing binds you except your thoughts; nothing limits you except your fears, and nothing controls you except your beliefs.” Enhancing self-advocacy skills of persons with disabilities will be a mirage and an unachievable goal without considering functional strategies.

The thesis statement for this discussion include: (a) examination of self-advocacy skills for individuals with disabilities, b) strategies to enhance self-advocacy skills of individual with disabilities, c) rationale behind self-advocacy among individuals with disabilities, d) challenges in achieving self-advocacy of individuals with disabilities, e) implications, f) suggestions.

1. Examination of Self-Advocacy Skills for Individuals with Disabilities

SELF-ACCEPTANCE

The very first and the foundation for all self-advocacy skills is self-acceptance. Self-acceptance as a self-advocacy skill leads to other positive self-

concepts or constructs such as self-awareness, high self-esteem, self-determination, self-assurance, self-assertiveness and so on. Self-acceptance eliminates self-induced negativities like self-pity, self-punishment, self-annihilation, self-doubt, self-rejection, self-devaluation and the likes. It will propel PWDs to believe in themselves that they are human beings worthy of respect. It forms the mind-set that disabilities do not mean one's life should be limited or lesser than that of other people. It creates understanding that existence of impairments or disabilities can sometimes limit or restrict or even prevent PWDs from doing certain things, but not inability to do anything or lack of other abilities or ineptitude or unworthiness. This will lead to high self-esteem or self-confidence, positive self-opinions and beliefs among PWDs. most especially for individuals with adventitious disabilities.

Awareness of Human and Disabilities Rights

PWDs must have good knowledge of their birth, human and disability rights at all levels as this forms greater part of self-advocacy skills. From homes, they should understand what their birth rights are among their sibling and other members of the family. They must extend this to their immediate environment and communities such as places of worship, schools, and others. PWDs must be informed of their birth rights in their neighbourhood locality and tribe or culture. For instance, they must be aware of their birth rights as male and female children and adults in their families. They must know what their birth rights are in their families and communities as a virtue of their positions. PWDs who are either the first born, queen or princess must have better understanding of their birthrights and entitlements of such positions.

In addition to knowledge of birth rights, PWDs must be equipped with wide factuality of all human rights as stipulated by the constitution of their country and United Nations (UN) declarations. They must be acquainted with these rights in order to be able to advocate and attain them. And to be able to come to the understanding of disenfranchisement when such occurs in order to prepare against such occurrence in future. PWDs must understand human right as moral principles or norms that describe certain standards of human behaviour which are constantly protected as legal rights in local and international laws (United Nations, 1948). According to Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by UN, everyone living on earth has thirty (30) basic human rights that must be protected by the law. These rights are currently referred to as 30 universal declaration of human rights or 30 basic human rights including rights to life, right to education, right to privacy, right to nationality, right to marry and have family, right to own things among others.

(<https://opseu.org>>2018/12, 30 Basic Human Rights List.

<https://www.un.org.unitednations.peace,dignity> and equality on a healthy planet-universal Declaration of Human Rights (retrieved on 22/5/2023

Again, PWDs must be equipped with sound knowledge of Disability Rights. In Nigeria for example, the rights of persons living with disability in Nigeria under

the discrimination against persons with disabilities (prohibition). Act 2019 guarantees the following rights: education rights, healthcare rights, accessibility rights, employment rights. Others are rights to first consideration in queues and in emergencies, prohibition of segregation, prohibition of use of PWDs in soliciting for arms, rights to participate in politics and public life, right to legal redress and right to certificate of disability. Ignorance of this act certainly will impede self-advocacy of PWDs in Nigeria. This awareness of rights seems endless, but that is not the only self-advocacy skills for PWDs.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Skills

ICT skills are of paramount importance to enhance self-advocacy skills of PWDs as they provide endless access to information. Remember, information is power. With good ICT skills PWDs can advocate for services, aids, scholarships, grants, assistive technologies, programmes, sponsorship and many others while at home. With

ICT skills they have access to information about what has happened and what will happen where, when, how, and who made it happen or will make it happen. Right in the comfort of their homes, they can as well advocate, communicate negotiate or talk about services, programmes, scholarships, grants, etc. Through the internet, samples of letters, proposals and other communications can be retrieved and adapted to suit their purposes. Addresses and contacts of offices, individuals, institutions NGOs etc. are also available on the internet, which they can leverage on. With their phones or laptops, they can connect to the whole world using search engines such as google, chrome, Firefox, opera mini, Bing etc.

Collaborative Skills

Collaboration is the ability to work together, sharing and brainstorming ideas with others for achievement of common goal. Together we stand, divided we fall they say. PWDs must be influential, be good communicators, decision makers, relationship builders, conflict resolvers etc. They must be able to communicate and share updates with others as events unfold, acknowledge efforts made by other partners such as special education professionals, lawyers, NGOs, associations and other collaborators. They must develop and demonstrate willingness to accept faults, forgive others and themselves in order to create atmosphere free of rancor. These collaborative skills will make advocacy activities more strategic, effective, sustainable and seamless. Every collaborator, partner or association has additional opportunities of seeing beyond initial target as the reach, networks and connections expand. They learn new skills from one another, build relationship, complement one another and reduce time, cost and energy on advocacy. All of these ensure sustainability of their advocacy activities and keep them relevant in the society.

Understanding One's Disabilities and Needs

Having good understanding of one's condition such as the type, nature and degree of disabilities will give clear pictures of what technological devices are needed. Two PWDs may not need same assistive technology devices because of individual uniqueness. That is why these devices are sometimes called personalized technology. Apart from this, PWDs must be abreast with the use and application of any of the devices that suit their type, nature and degree the disabilities. The reason for this is that these devices aid individuals with disabilities to perform functions that might be difficult otherwise. They also play vital roles in achieving a full life because they can improve the level of people's independence, increase privacy and dignity, and help PWDs to gain more control over their lives there by enhancing their self-advocacy skills. Having good knowledge of their disabilities also helps them acknowledge their strengths and address challenges.

Communication Skills

These skills involve expressing one's needs, concerns, and preferences effectively. It includes using clear language, being assertive but not aggressive, and actively listening to others advocating for oneself in a confident and respectful manner. It's about expressing needs and opinions while considering the feelings and viewpoints of others.

Decision-Making Skills

Persons with disabilities need to develop the ability to make informed choices about their own lives. This involves gathering information, considering options, and understanding the potential consequences of their decisions.

Problem-Solving Skills

Problem-solving skills help individuals identify challenges they face and find ways to overcome them. This might involve brainstorming solutions, evaluating pros and cons, and adapting strategies as needed.

Goal-Setting

Setting goals provides a sense of purpose and direction. Persons with disabilities can work towards personal, educational, or career objectives, and celebrate their achievements along the way.

Resilience

Resilience is the ability to bounce back from setbacks and adapt to changes. It's about maintaining a positive outlook and finding ways to overcome obstacles, which is particularly important for persons with disabilities. Developing these self-

advocacy skills equips individuals with disabilities to navigate various aspects of their lives effectively and confidently, promoting independence and a higher quality of life.

2. Strategies to Enhance Self-Advocacy Skills of Individuals with Disabilities.

Training to enhance self-advocacy skills for persons with disabilities involves a combination of educational, experiential, and supportive approaches. Such trainings can be structured in the following ways.

Education about Rights and Resources: Provide information about disability rights, laws, and available resources. Understanding their rights empowers individuals to confidently advocate for themselves.

Skill Workshops: Conduct workshops on communication, decision-making, problem-solving, and other relevant skills. These interactive sessions help individuals practice and refine their abilities.

Role-Playing: Engage in role-playing scenarios where individuals can practice asserting their needs and preferences in different situations. This builds confidence and prepares them for real-life interactions.

Personalized Goal-Setting: Help individuals set personal goals related to self-advocacy. These goals could be as simple as asking for accommodations or as complex as speaking at public events. Working towards these goals gradually builds their self-advocacy skills.

Mentoring and Peer Support: Connect individuals with mentors who have strong self-advocacy skills or facilitate peer support groups. Learning from others' experiences and successes can be highly beneficial.

Self-Awareness Exercises: Introduce exercises to enhance self-awareness, such as journaling emotions, strengths, and challenges. This helps individuals understand themselves better, making them more effective advocates.

Problem-Solving Scenarios: Present various challenges and ask individuals to brainstorm possible solutions. Encourage them to evaluate the pros and cons of each solution, fostering critical thinking.

Public Speaking Practice: Engage individuals in activities that require public speaking or presentations. This boosts their confidence in expressing themselves and their needs to larger audiences.

Advocacy Plans: Help individuals create personalized advocacy plans that outline their goals, strategies, and potential obstacles. Regularly reviewing and adjusting these plans keeps them focused and motivated.

Real-Life Application: Encourage individuals to apply their self-advocacy skills in real-life situations, such as at school, work, or in social interactions. Providing feedback and guidance afterward helps them improve.

Feedback and Reflection: Regularly provide constructive feedback on their self-advocacy efforts. Reflection on their experiences helps individuals learn from both successes and challenges.

Continuous Learning: Self-advocacy is an ongoing process. Encourage individuals to seek continuous learning through books, online resources, workshops, and seminars.

It is essential to know that self-advocacy training should be tailored toward individual's unique needs and preferences. Creating a supportive and encouraging environment is key to fostering the development of these skills..

3. Rationale behind Self-Advocacy Skills for Persons with Disabilities

According to (Bonnie, n.d.), when we speak of “the civil rights movement,” “the parents’ movement,” or “the independent-living movement,” we are referring to something like a crusade, campaign or juggernaut powered by people who have been directly affected by oppressive attitudes and practices, which has fostered change in our society. The self-advocacy movement is just such a force. Today, people with intellectual disability and other developmental disabilities are on national and state boards and committees, are presenters at major conventions, and are a voice for themselves and others who have similar disabilities. How did this come about? Let us take a look at a few instances.

Origin of Self-Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities

The self-advocacy movement probably began in Sweden during the 1960s. There, people with intellectual disability were supported to form and lead their own leisure clubs. National conferences for the members of these clubs held in 1968 and 1970, and the participants developed statements about how they wanted to be treated. In 1972 the idea spread to Great Britain and Canada, and in 1973 a group from Oregon attended a conference in Canada that purported to be for people with intellectual disability. However, this group was unhappy with the Canadian conference, which they felt was dominated by professionals, and went home and formed a self-advocacy group. They called themselves “People First,” because they felt that their disabilities were secondary to their personhood. From there, the idea of self-advocacy spread across the United States. Along the way, they have held

international, national and statewide conferences and have begun to form their own national organization "Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered," which is governed by a Steering Committee made up of 16 representatives. It was formed in September 1991 at a national conference in Nashville, Tenn., where participants voted to have a national coalition of state and local organizations. In 1993, there were at least 27 statewide self-advocacy organizations, some having as many as 75 local chapters and some with as few as two or three. Many of these are supported by local or state chapters of The Arc. Many others are independent or are supported by other organizations that provide assistance to the group members.

Lack of Equity (Social Exclusion)

According to (International Labour Organization, 2010),

Some 650 million people or one-tenth of the global population have a disability. Of these, approximately 470 million are of working age. People with disabilities face unjustifiable discrimination, and consequently exclusion from employment, skills training, education, health care services, and other key areas of development. Their exclusion not only prevents them from participating fully in society but also has economic implications for societies.

The above statement by the International Labour Organization (ILO) proves an existing challenge in the society for persons with disabilities. In the words of (Ozaji, 2023)

The environment is known to have three elements: the physical, the social and the conceptual (policies and laws). Each of these is not as friendly as it should be to facilitate the social inclusion of persons with disabilities. As long as these elements are hostile, persons with disabilities' attempt to access inclusive society will remain imperiled.

Indeed, the existing challenge to inclusion (prevailing social exclusion) which has existed before now gave rise to and necessitated self-advocacy for persons with disabilities.

Existence of Mediators for Persons with Disabilities

Honeyman (2013) posits that disabilities' mediation, in general terms, refers to any mediation of any conflict arising over the circumstances of a person with disability. It is simply having a go-between or a spokes-person for persons with disabilities. Over time, persons with disabilities have become uncomfortable having a "normal" or non-disability person as a mediator. This is because, they understand their plight more than anyone will. As a result of selfish interests that began to encroach into and overwhelm the hearts of mediators, persons with disabilities began to stand up and speak for themselves thus, giving rise to self-advocacy for persons with disabilities.

Negative Attitudes towards Persons with Disabilities.

Ozaji (2005) opined that Helen Keller, the veteran blind-deaf genius at the peak of her life made a vital and intricate statement regarding attitude which has

now become heroic: “not blindness but the attitude of the society towards blindness that is the greatest burden to bear”. These negative attitudes toward persons with disabilities stemmed as a result of beliefs, feelings, wrong perceptions, experiences, wrong information and so on. There is always a point in a human’s life where he/she retaliates to a negative treatment meted out to him/her. Persons with disabilities had to arise and speak out giving birth to self-advocacy for persons with disabilities.

Lack of Productivity Due To PWDs’ Relegation to the Background

Persons with disabilities also have something to bring to the table just like anyone else. They are intelligent, experienced in different facets of life, motivated, talented and skilled. The society sees them as unproductive and weak hence, no need to incorporate them into societal productivity. Persons with disabilities in a bid to have their voices heard and prove the society wrong of its misjudgment had to start advocating for themselves which resulted in self-advocacy.

These and many more were reasons that gave rise to self-advocacy for persons with disabilities and spread out to become popular and widely practiced as we have now. It wasn’t easy for them from the start as pioneers and so has it been up till now for persons with disabilities.

4. Barriers Hindering Self-Advocacy Skills of Persons with Disabilities

Before one can venture into enhancing the self-advocacy skills of persons with disabilities, a critical consideration has to be made on certain barriers and challenges confronting their self-advocacy skills. Knowing the root-cause of a problem is half-way into solving it. Below are a few barriers hindering self-advocacy skills of persons with disabilities;

Lack of Parents’ Acceptance of Disability

This to an extent is the root-cause hindering the development of self-advocacy skills of persons with disabilities. The way and manner a child is groomed and brought up affects how he lives his entire life. Most often, parents who give birth to children with disabilities tend not to see it coming. The expectation is that the child will be normal and if that be not the case, the result can be devastating and traumatic. Such parents find it hard to get to the level of acceptance of such condition and the more it lingers, the more it affects the child’s development consequently leading to low self-esteem, feeling of rejection, self-denial and devaluation of oneself amongst others. Such a child may never grow up to advocate for himself/herself.

Lack of Opportunities for Peer Education and Support

“Everyone has the right to education” according to Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). This cannot be stated more clearly. It is a litmus test for the individual to assess the government’s commitments to

fundamental rights. The UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960), which has been recognized as a key pillar in the Education For All (EFA) process, is the first legally binding international instrument which lays down core elements of the right to education. This Convention prohibits any discrimination in the field of education and expresses the principle of equality of educational opportunities. If persons with disabilities don't get the required education and support, they need, how then can they be knowledgeable enough on the need to advocate for themselves?

Lack of Access to Information on Self-Advocacy, Self-Determination and the Leadership Development Process.

Another barrier to self-advocacy skills of persons with disabilities is in their unawareness of the concept of self-advocacy. Many do not have access to information regarding self-advocacy, the need for self-determination and leadership development process. Without this knowledge, it is impossible to practice self-advocacy. The information could be withheld deliberately by those who do not want persons with disabilities to speak out for themselves. This is in a bid to keep them trapped and continually enslaved.

Lack of Opportunities to Exercise Choice and Take Risks.

Persons with disabilities are often considered incapable of managing and handling the affairs of their lives due to certain misconceptions and general societal beliefs. According to Cornel (n.d.), persons with disabilities are not allowed to hold and spend any money, be able and encouraged to feed themselves, cook for themselves (risk of cutting, burning), or even dress themselves in items of clothing of their choice (risk of ridicule), the reason for not washing themselves could have been due to risk of drowning or flooding the building (health and safety issues). If individuals with disabilities are being prevented or discouraged from taking risks, then consequences are negative: timidity, reticence, shyness, dependence, and exclusion. With these, there is no way possible of developing self-acceptance and self-esteem which then results in self-advocacy skills.

Secondly, in a higher-institution-setting having University of Jos as a case study, one will realize that students with disabilities are not even given the opportunity to make their choices of the courses or field of study they want to go into. It is more like an established fact and a rule that once a person with disability is applying to a University, the course to study has to be special education and if the person has visual impairment, that clearly spells out the unit he will be placed in. The same applies to someone who has hearing impairment. In a situation where a person with disability opts to study a different course other than special education example; Law, Medicine or even Engineering, the school management will hardly approve of that which is simply being judgmental on their part.

Low Expectations on the Capacity of Individuals with Disabilities to Know what is Best for them and How to Get Their Needs Met

Devaluation means ascribing a lower status position including roles to someone on account of failure of the person to meet certain set standards (Ozaji, 2005). This fosters the stereotype of helplessness and often results in overprotection. The society considers persons with disabilities to be weaklings and vulnerable hence, not capable enough to know what is best for them and to go about their affairs by themselves. This makes parents, relatives and friends of persons with disabilities overprotective of them considering their supposed helpless state. Consequently, individuals with disabilities tend to lose confidence in and value for themselves thus, affecting their self-advocacy skills.

The Existence of Societal Attitudes that Marginalize or Devalue People with Disabilities

This has a way of restricting, restraining and minimizing the positive outcomes of self-advocacy efforts. No matter the effort(s) being put in training persons with disabilities in advocating for themselves and the extent to its achievement, the existence of negative and stereotypic attitudes of the society towards these persons will yet nullify the effect of self-advocacy skills. As long as the society has a pre-conceived mindset and bad attitude which devalues and denigrates persons with disabilities, they will never be valued or paid attention to in any sphere of life.

Lack of Access to ICT

According to Quarless (2017), in an increasingly digital age, information and communication technologies (ICTs) offers new ways of meeting certain commitment towards those members of our society who have disabilities. While there have been great advances in the development of specialized assistive technology, such as microprocessor-controlled prosthetics or digital hearing aids, more general-purpose technologies, such as ordinary computers, tablets and smartphones offer significant opportunities for broader social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities can begin to network on the internet, share their views and become advocates of themselves wherever they are. Unfortunately, their use of ICT is limited by their lack of access to technology. Barriers to access can include a lack of awareness of available technologies and of what can be achieved through their use, a lack of available training in their adaptive use, and a lack of financial resources to purchase the hardware, software, network connectivity and specialized support equipment that may be necessary.

5. Ways to Eliminate Barriers to Self-Advocacy Skills for PWDs

Think of it this way. When there is a channel of water flowing through a hole and in the process of time, dirt and debris gets to accumulate around the hole

resulting in less out-flow of water. A way to increase/enhance the flow of water through that hole is by simply taking off the dirt that surrounds the hole (barriers) and the flow of water will invariably be enhanced.

Parent Education and Counselling

Parent education is an educational programme designed to improve knowledge about various tasks in bringing up a child with disability (Ozaji, Unachukwu & Kolo 2016). Parents are the care-givers of children with disabilities before they grow up to become adults, hence the need to educate and counsel them on practices and methods of taking care of children with disabilities. This is a crucial aspect to target if children with disabilities are expected to grow up and become adults who have self-advocacy skills to boldly speak up in a vast and complex society as ours.

Creation of Opportunities for Peer Education and Support for Persons with Disabilities

This has to be mandatory and enforced. Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities guarantees the right to education of persons with disabilities. The Convention provides that, with a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning. In paragraph 2 of Article 24, the Convention provides that “In realizing this right, States Parties shall ensure that: (a) Persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability; (b) Persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live.” With the above document and other legal backings on the education of persons with disabilities, one can easily file a lawsuit if that opportunity is deprived of them. When educated, persons with disabilities tend to know their right(s) and as such will advocate for themselves when those rights are being trampled upon.

Ensuring Access to Information on Self-Advocacy, Self-Determination and the Leadership Development Process

Persons with disabilities must be allowed to gain access to information regarding self-advocacy and self-determination. It is a bad idea and an unlawful thing to withhold this information from them. They need to know that a thing such as self-advocacy exists (taking a stand and speaking-up for oneself without necessarily waiting for someone to speak on their behalf). This enlightenment and awareness could be done through organizing seminars, conferences and workshops on self-advocacy, self-empowerment and the like.

Provision of Opportunities for Them To Exercise Choice and Take Risks

By supporting individuals with disabilities to take risks, we actually will be helping them build confidence, develop life skills and knowledge, gain a role in the community and become independent. Persons with disabilities need to be perceived as human beings capable of knowing what they want and making their personal choices. Except in peculiar cases and instances, they should be given freedom to choose what they want, how they want it to be and even try out new things for themselves. Persons with disabilities should be allowed to study whatever course they want to in the higher institution. Their right-to-choice-of-course to study should not be mitigated as long as they are qualified to study those courses.

Changing and Shaping Societal Attitudes

Societal negative beliefs and attitudes toward persons with disabilities has a way of marginalizing or devaluing people with disabilities, which minimizes the positive outcomes of self-advocacy efforts. This is a very crucial and important factor when considering the enhancement of self-advocacy skills of persons with disabilities. These persons with disabilities live and are part of the society. This means the society plays a key role in their lives. For them to achieve a healthy and better living, society's notion towards them has to be changed and redirected towards the positive. The good news is that this can be achieved. According to Pheroza and Simon (2005), it is easier to change societal attitudes than personal attitudes towards persons with disabilities.

Ensuring Access to ICT for PWDs

ICT is a very vital sector and space to be considered in this our present digital age. Thus, there is a need for initiatives that build awareness, expand digital literacy, finance the acquisition of devices and software, and provide technical support for the use of ICTs among persons with disabilities. Both governments and private institutions have a responsibility to ensure that the means through which they digitally interface with the public – such as websites, apps, and electronic kiosks – can be used by those who are visually or mobility impaired. Having access to information and communication technology by persons with disabilities will afford them richer opportunities to maximize in the digital space, mingle and network with people from around the world. By this, they can learn to utilize the digital space to their advantage.

Summary

For self-advocacy skills of persons with disabilities to be fully enhanced, every obstacle must be removed. Individuals with disabilities must equip themselves by accepting their conditions, acquire formal education and other skills such as ICT skills. The society has major role to play in enhancing self-advocacy skills of persons with disabilities, from home, the parents must give all necessary supports to their children who have disabilities. The larger society must change all

negative attitudes that impede enhancement of self-advocacy skills of persons with disabilities. Professionals and NGOs who serve as mouthpiece for persons with disabilities must change and advance to trainers of self-advocacy skills for persons with disabilities.

Implications

- Enhanced self-advocacy skills of PWDs will set aside devaluation and pity from the society.
- Enhanced self-advocacy skills of PWDs will amount to attainment of self-satisfaction of these individuals
- Enhanced self-advocacy skills of PWDs will make them to contribute their own quota to the development of the nation
- Enhanced self-advocacy skills of PWDs will alleviate the burden on the parents so the family livelihood is improved
- Enhanced self-advocacy skills of PWDs will change rights of PWDs from fiction to reality.

Suggestions

- Higher institutions that train professionals in Special Education are urged to introduce and sustain courses that will enhance PWDs' self-advocacy skills.
- Professional bodies and NGOs are urged to provide opportunities for PWDs to increase their self-advocacy skills in addition to advocating for them.
- PWDs are urged to work hard by themselves in self-advocacy by doing things that will enhance their self-advocacy skills for instance by not playing the roles of disabilities.
- Parents of children with disabilities are urged to inculcate in their children self-advocacy skills by accepting the children and make them (children) accept their conditions to see abilities in their disabilities
- The society at large is also urged to support programmes and activities on self-advocacy skills of PWDs by creating both physical and social enabling environment.

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