

An Insight into the Explored and the Unexplored Aspects of Vision Rehabilitation in Nigeria: A Systematic Review of Literature

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Abstract

Purpose: There is paucity of research on rehabilitation of visually impaired persons in Nigeria. A myriad of gap in knowledge exist in what rehabilitation options are available, priority areas for rehabilitation, as well as important themes in rehabilitation research. Thus, the aim of the review is to highlight predominant areas of research concern and consequently, reflect and discuss the neglected aspects of vision rehabilitation.

Methods: The following databases were accessed: Medline PubMed, CINAHL, Cochrane Databases of Systematic reviews, Web of Science, AFROLIB, SCOPUS, Embase, EBSCO Africa-wide Information, and MEDLIB. Other databases accessed include Google Scholar, Google, and African Journals Online (AJOL). Keywords used included: Visual impairment, low vision rehabilitation in Nigeria, visual disability, blindness, rehabilitation of blind, vision rehabilitation, visual rehabilitation in Nigeria, adaptation to visual impairment.

Results: From the accessible databases, 87 articles related to rehabilitation of people with blindness and low vision in Nigeria were found; of these, only 16 articles met the inclusion criteria set for this review (vision rehabilitation studies conducted between 2000 and 2018). The findings reveal that much of the research on vision rehabilitation in Nigeria focused mainly on vocational and formal education rehabilitation to enhance opportunities for paid employment, independence and stakeholders involvement.

Conclusion: Research on the emotional needs of visually impaired individuals is scarce and relatively given little or no attention. Vision care practitioners and researchers need to pay special attention to the emotional rehabilitation needs of visually impaired persons.

Keywords: Visual disability, blindness, rehabilitation of blind, vision rehabilitation, visual rehabilitation in Nigeria.

Introduction

The World health Organisation (WHO) estimates that more than 90 percent of the world's visually impaired persons live in low income countries.¹ The prevalence of visual impairment in Nigeria is high.² Available data and epidemiological evidence suggest that 4.25 million

adults aged 40 years and older in Nigeria are visually impaired.³ With the high prevalence of visual impairment, the issue of demand for vision rehabilitation services (VRS) is increasing and the expectations for improved access to VRS is also increasing. Vision rehabilitation

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3. Kyari F, Gudlavalleti MV, Sivasubramaniam S, Gilbert CE, Abdull MM, Entekume G, Foster A. Prevalence of blindness and visual impairment in Nigeria: The national blindness and visual impairment survey. *Investigative ophthalmology & visual science*. 2009 May 1;50(5):2033-9.

services refer to a set of specialised trainings to enable visually impaired persons (VIPs) cope and adapt to the challenges of living with visual impairment.^{4,5} Visual rehabilitation covers a multitude of potential activities, and interventions – the outcome of which is intended to bring some changes in a person’s capacity to perform certain tasks, as well as their capacity to cope with the challenges of living with the disability.^{6,7}

Available evidences suggest that only 5 percent of VIPs in Nigeria have access to VRS.⁸ The problems of access to VRS are well documented in literature.⁸⁻¹⁰ However, much of the problems of “access” to VRS are compounded in literature by the homogeneous and generic portrayal of vision rehabilitation. It is important to note that vision rehabilitation services are not generic but myriad; ranging from rehabilitation for vocation or avocation, to rehabilitation for personal or self-care, household management, reading and writing, braille, coping with activities of daily living, and use of computer assistive technologies. Thus while VRS sounds like a generic concept; it is a broad concept from a practical and operational perspective. For example, at one end of the spectrum are blind persons who would require a wider scope of VRS, and at the other end of the spectrum are individuals with less severe degrees of visual impairment; who would require minor rehabilitation.

Although VIPs should be provided with low vision rehabilitation services, access to VRS remains hindered by a variety of barriers, including a limited option for specialised low vision rehabilitation services. Research focus on VRS for blind persons and people living with low vision in Nigeria, however, remains scarce. Little is known about specific VRS that are most likely to be sought after by VIPs. Understanding the aspects of VRS that are emphasized in research could provide insight about the areas of need for VRS as well as foster a more critical

insight into underserved aspects of vision rehabilitation (VR). This study aims to answer the following questions;

1. What aspects of vision rehabilitation are most explored in research?
2. What aspects of VR are neglected in research?

Methods

A systematic evidence-based process was used to gather data for the study.¹¹ The following electronic databases were searched for data relevant to the study: Medline PubMed, CINAHL, Cochrane Databases of Systematic reviews, Web of Science, AFROLIB, SCOPUS, Embase, EBSCO Africa-wide Information, and MEDLIB. Other searched online repositories include Google Scholar, Google, and African Journals OnLine (AJOL). Only articles related to rehabilitation of individuals with visual impairment were included in the review. The search terms and keywords used in the search are stated in Table 1. The inclusion and exclusion criteria are as specified in Table 2.

Results

A total of 87 articles related to rehabilitation of people with blindness and low vision in Nigeria were found; of these, only 16 articles met the inclusion criteria and were included in this study. Out of the 71 excluded articles, 24 articles were excluded due to their focus on other forms of disability rehabilitation (not visual impairment) among non-Nigerian participants. Another four (4) articles were excluded because they were visual impairment prevalence studies and did not explore rehabilitation of visually impaired persons (VIPs), while a majority of the studies (43 articles) were excluded due to their focus on the causes and clinical characteristics of low vision. Articles that were found exploring visual rehabilitation of VIPs in Nigeria are thematically represented in Figure 1.

4. Culham LE, Ryan B, Jackson AJ, Hill AR, Jones B, Miles C, Young JA, Bunce C, Bird AC. Low vision services for vision rehabilitation in the United Kingdom. *British Journal of Ophthalmology*. 2002 Jul 1;86(7):743-7.
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11. Law MC, MacDermid J, editors. *Evidence-based rehabilitation: A guide to practice*. Slack Incorporated; 2008. McMaster. Canada

Table 1. Keywords

Keywords
Visual impairment, low vision rehabilitation in Nigeria, visual disability, blindness, rehabilitation of blind, vision rehabilitation, visual rehabilitation in Nigeria, adaptation to visual impairment.

Table 2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion criteria
Articles about studies on vision rehabilitation in Nigeria	Articles not focusing on the subject of vision rehabilitation in Nigeria
Articles written in English	Articles written in Languages other than English
Articles published from 2000 to 2018	Articles published outside the period of focus (i.e.2000 to 2018)

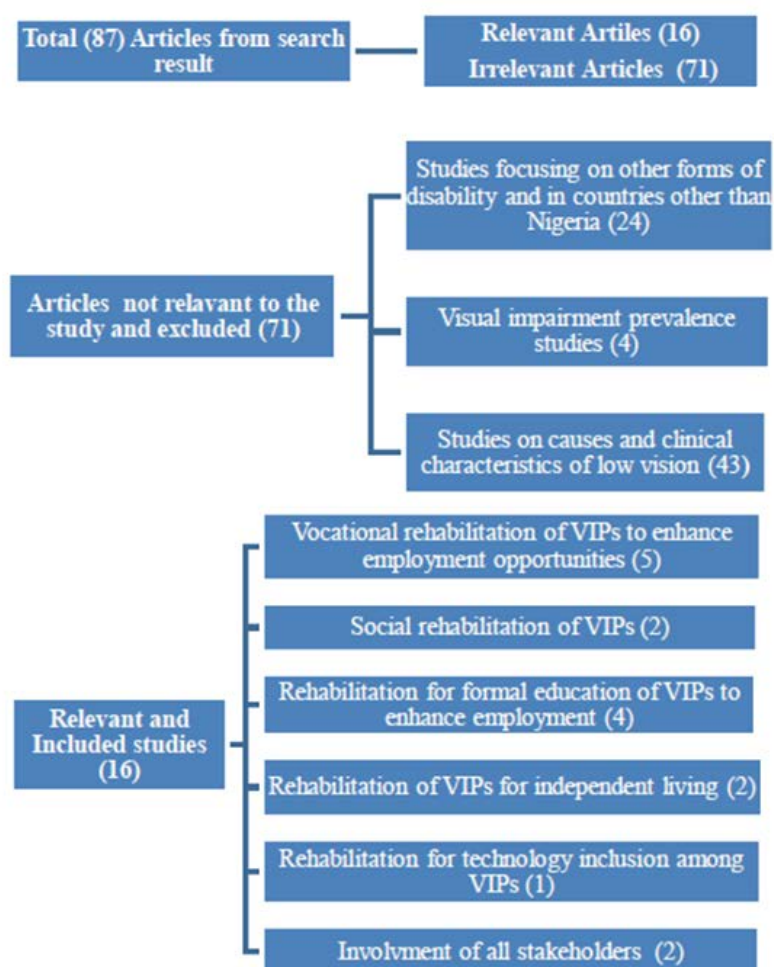


Figure 1. Result of Systematic Search About Low Vision Rehabilitation in Nigeria

Table 3. Analysis of Included Articles

Authors	Year	Title	Methods	Results and recommendation
Ademola-Popoola, et al. ¹²	2010	Psychosocial characteristics of totally blind people in a Nigerian city.	Cross-sectional descriptive study of totally blind people in Ilorin, using a self-report questionnaire (SRQ)	Vocational rehabilitation and social rehabilitation of blind street beggars.
Oluwatoni et al. ¹³	2018	Rehabilitation and paid employment for blind people in a low income country	A cross sectional study to determine mode of rehabilitation and employment status	Tertiary education should be a component of rehabilitation to enhance employment opportunities for blind people.
Balarabe et al, ¹⁴	2014	The Sokoto blind beggars: causes of blindness and barriers to rehabilitation services.	A cross-sectional survey of blind participants using interviewer administered questionnaire	Rehabilitation for formal education and provision of vocational skills.
Okonji, & Ogwezy, ¹⁵	2018	Rehabilitation for Independent Living: Challenges and Priorities of Visually Impaired Older People in Urban Nigeria	A survey method; using questionnaires	Rehabilitation for outdoor activities of daily living should be the keystone of low vision care.
Omede & Okpe ¹⁶	2016	Vocational rehabilitation programmes for disabled people in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects.	Essay	Vocational trainings and job placement for blind people.
Balarabe et al. ¹⁷	2014	Exploring the options for alternative means of livelihood for blind street beggars in Sokoto, Nigeria.	A cross-sectional study using semi-structured questionnaire	Vocational rehabilitation for an alternative means of livelihood.
Tunde-Ayinmode et al., ⁸	2011	Psychological and social adjustment to blindness: Understanding from two groups of blind people in Ilorin, Nigeria.	A cross-sectional descriptive study using 20-item Self-Reporting Questionnaire(SRQ) and a pro forma	Rehabilitation in education, vocational training, employment, and mobility.
Balarabe & Mahmoud. ¹⁸	2014	Approaches to tackling the menace of street begging by visually disabled persons in Northern Nigeria.	Electronic and manual review of literature to assess causes of blindness and challenges to accessing curative and rehabilitation support services	A comprehensive eye care program rehabilitative services with strong public health education campaign.
Okonkwo et al. ¹⁹	2017	Challenges, Counselling Needs, and Coping Strategies of Students with Visual Impairment in Regular Secondary Schools in Nigeria.	Descriptive survey using cross-sectional design	Rehabilitation for effective study habits and techniques of self-activity.
Basey et al. ²⁰	2018	Social capital, social relationships and adults with acquired visual impairment:a Nigerian perspective.	A qualitative study using a phenomenological approach	Visual rehabilitation services should place greater emphasis on addressing the social goals of visually impaired persons.

8. Tunde-Ayinmode MF, Akande TM, Ademola-Popoola DS. Psychologica and social adjustment to blindness: Understanding from two groups of blind people in Ilorin, Nigeria. *Annals of African medicine*. 2011;10(2). 1-13.
12. Ademola-Popoola DS, Tunde-Ayinmode MF, Akande TM. Psychosocial characteristics of totally blind people in a Nigerian city. *Middle East African journal of ophthalmology*. 2010 Oct;17(4):335
13. Oluwatoni OO, Olubunmi, TB, Adetunji HA, Taibat OO, Micheal E, and Olusoji, J.D. Rehabilitation and paid employment for blind people in a low income country. *Journal of Advances in Medicine and Medical Research*, 2018 ;25(8):1-9.
14. Balarabe AH, Mahmoud AO, Ayanniyi AA. The Sokoto blind beggars: causes of blindness and barriers to rehabilitation services. *Middle East African journal of ophthalmology*. 2014 Apr;21(2):147.
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17. Balarabe AH, Mahmoud AO, Omolase CO, Nasiru M. Exploring the options for alternative means of livelihood for blind street beggars in Sokoto, Nigeria. *Nigerian journal of clinical practice*. 2014;17(5):637-40.
18. Balarabe AH, Mahmoud AO. Approaches to tackling the menace of street begging by visually disabled persons in Northern Nigeria. *Sub-Saharan African Journal of Medicine*. 2014 Oct 1;1(4):161.
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20. Bassey E, Ellison C, Walker R. Social capital, social relationships and adults with acquired visual impairment: a nigerian perspective. *Disability and rehabilitation*. 2018 Jan 31:1-8.

Table 3. Analysis of Included Articles

Authors	Year	Title	Methods	
Amwe, & Aliu ²¹	2016	Effectiveness of community-based rehabilitation program for persons with special needs in Plateau State.	Descriptive survey using structured questionnaire	Communities, parents and/or families of persons with visual impairment, and other stakeholders should be actively involved in the rehabilitation of persons with visual impairment.
Bassey et al., ¹⁰	2019	Perception of blind rehabilitation services among adults with acquired blindness in Nigeria: Attention to functional goals.	Qualitative study using in-depth interviews	Vision rehabilitation should focus more on functional needs and activities of daily living.
Mahmoud et al. ²²	2005	Ophthalmologists' perceptions of the rehabilitation services for the irreversibly blind in Nigeria.	Survey using semi-structured questionnaire	There is a need for partnership between government, non-governmental organizations, and parents to mobilize resources for improved rehabilitation services.
Okoye et al. ²³	2007	Barriers to the provision of clinical low-vision services among ophthalmologists in Nigeria.	Cross-sectional survey	Widespread health education/ awareness campaigns in low-vision care, targeted primarily at ophthalmologists, allied eye-care providers, and the general public.
Ekpenyong & Ndukwe. ²⁴	2010	Provision of low vision service in the department of ophthalmology university of Calabar teaching hospital.	Retrospective study/review of clinical records	Education, employment prospects, Independence, and quality of life of people with lowvision could be improved through vision rehabilitation.
Lucky, & Achebe ²⁵	2013	Information service delivery to the visually impaired: a case study of hope for the blind foundation wusasa, Zaria (Nigeria).	Case-study	Low vision rehabilitation should meet the reading needs of persons with visual impairment through various assistive technology devices which include Braille printer, low vision aid, screen reader to help them to achieve their academic career.

10. Bassey E, Ellison C, Walker R. Perception of blind rehabilitation services among adults with acquired blindness in Nigeria: Attention to functional goals. *British Journal of Visual Impairment*. 2019 Jan;37(1):6-16.
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Discussion

The review suggests that existing studies focused more on the issue of vocational rehabilitation to enhance job placement for visually impaired persons.^{8,12,16,17,24} Rehabilitation for formal and tertiary education was also emphasized as an aspect that could enhance employment opportunities for blind people.^{13,14,18,19} Other aspects of rehabilitation concern included rehabilitation to enhance participation in social activities²⁰, rehabilitation for independent living^{10,15} and the involvement of all stakeholders for a more efficient visual rehabilitation^{21,22}. Only one study explored the aspect of technology use to enhance the everyday life of VIPs.²⁵

Apparently, much of the research in available literature are limited to vocational and tertiary education rehabilitation as a way to expand employment and livelihood opportunities for visually impaired persons in Nigeria²⁶ The lack of employment and restricted opportunities to earn income has resulted in high levels of poverty among VIPs compared to the rest of the Nigerian population and some VIPs resort to street begging to eke out a livelihood.¹⁴ Blind people and individuals with low vision have not only historically been under-represented in the

Nigerian labour market²⁷, they are also more likely to be confronted with barriers that limit their access to education - which is largely a facilitator for access to paid employment as educationally qualified job seekers have higher chances of being employed. It is therefore, not surprising that the challenge of unemployment among many VIPs has dominated research thinking in the field of low vision rehabilitation.

None of the studies focused on the emotional rehabilitation needs of visually impaired people. The psychological and emotional well-being of VIPs are important issues in contemporary practice of low vision and rehabilitation of VIPs^{28,29}, but are evidently the most neglected aspects of vision rehabilitation research in Nigeria. It is important to note that, for many individuals newly diagnosed with vision impairment, the denial^{30,31} and emotional trauma could be depressing.^{32,33} Difficulties with making emotional and psychological adjustments to functional loss as a result of vision impairment can cause feelings of frustration at having to be overly reliant on support from others.³¹ Furthermore, anxiety about the potential of low vision to progress gradually into total blindness often leads to

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emotional reactions such as denial, anger and fear of decreased independence,^{34,35} and these negative reactions may lead to social withdrawal and poor socialisation.³⁶ A visually impaired person who is unable to make necessary adjustments to adapt or compensate for such losses may go through psychological symptoms such as anxiety, stress, and major depression which may ultimately affect their well-being.³⁷

The global practice of vision rehabilitation work with VIPs has advanced over time, and in recent years, the need to involve stakeholders (including the family of the VIPs) in rehabilitation programmes is being advocated.^{38,39} However, this study suggests that while it is a researched

topic, not much research has been conducted on the issue. Although only one study explored the issue of rehabilitation of VIPs for technology use,²⁵ it is an area of growing demand as the evolution of technology and the increasing expectations of VIPs to have full access to Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) is changing the visual rehabilitation landscape. The current study, however, assumes that the increasing focus of research on vocational and formal rehabilitation for employment opportunities does not necessarily suggest that it is the most important aspect of vision rehabilitation. In vision rehabilitation practice, it might be worth allowing the VIP to determine what aspect of vision rehabilitation they deem most paramount.

Conclusion

This systematic review of existing literature between 2000 and 2018 shows that research on visual rehabilitation among visually impaired Nigerians has a predominant focus on vocational and formal education aspects of rehabilitation in order to enhance employment opportunities for visually impaired individuals. Research on the emotional and psychological aspects of rehabilitation among visually impaired persons in Nigeria is scarce. While a VIP might not be able to afford the entire scope of rehabilitation services, it might be a worthwhile practice for the rehabilitation practitioner to inform the VIP about the scope of possible and/or available options. Such an approach could, perhaps, enable the VIP identify priority areas by comparing their abilities to perform certain tasks alongside satisfaction with performance in such tasks. The result of this approach is that where a VIP struggles with a particular activity but has no interest in or need for rehabilitation in that field of activity, resources are not wasted on rehabilitation interventions that are superfluous but can be focused on the issues identified by the individual as being most important to them.

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25. Lucky AT, Achebe NE. Information service delivery to the visually impaired: a case study of hope for the blind foundation wusasa, Zaria (Nigeria). *Research Journal of Information Technology*. 2013 Mar 1;5(1):18-23.
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