

## **Examining the Nexus Between Self-Determination of Youth Who are Blind or Deaf and Employment**

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### **Abstract**

*Access to employment depends on intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Despite advancements and targeted training in Technical Education and legal provisions to promote the employment of persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Kenya, reports and research indicate an unemployment rate of 80-90% among people of this category. Employers report a lack of visibility of young persons who are blind or deaf in the employment pools. Existing literature dwells a lot on external barriers to employment with little attention given to intrinsic factors of the individual youth. This study sought to examine the nexus between self-determination and employment of youth who were either blind or deaf after undergoing technical training. A cross-sectional survey with 146 participants was carried out, utilizing structured questionnaires. The sample size was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan technique. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse quantitative data, while thematic analysis was used for qualitative data. Statistical analyses, including Chi-square tests and logistic regression models, were applied to examine associations between self-determination and employment. The study reveals that self-determination, expressed as self-advocacy, self-presentation, and self-expression, were statistically significant in the employment of TVET graduate youths who are either blind or deaf. Participants who exhibited higher levels of self-determination were in employment. Self-expression was the most significant intrinsic characteristic. Overall self-determination reflected a significant P-value of 0.002. These results were further confirmed by the self-reporting of employers who indicated that they preferred to meet the graduate youth in person before job engagement. In conclusion, self-determination is an intrinsic competence that has to be nurtured in youth who are either blind or deaf to enhance their employability and ensure that they pass the "fit for work" evaluation during in-person sessions with prospective employers.*

**Keywords:** Self -determination, Employment, Youth, Deaf, Blind

## 1.0 Introduction

In a rapidly evolving job market, pursuing employment opportunities is a universal aspiration, transcending barriers of age, gender, and socio-economic background. However, to youth who are either deaf or blind, this pursuit often presents unique and formidable challenges (Jahan & Holloway, 2020). They face not only the conventional hurdles of job hunting but also the additional complexities of living with sensory disabilities (Agyei-Okyere et al., 2019). The central issue of this study is thus the employment of these young individuals, particularly how their self-determination, or lack thereof, shapes their employment. This is in consideration of the prominence that the concept of self-determination has gained in literature (Watson, 2019; Yadav & Chakrabarti, 2022; Boateng et al., 2023) in the context of disability empowerment and Inclusive education. Self-determination encompasses skills such as goal-setting, problem-solving, self-advocacy, and decision-making and has been suggested in the literature (Ayalew et al., 2018; Boateng et al., 2023; Watson, 2019) as very important skills for work. This is pivotal for youth who are either blind or deaf in overcoming barriers to employment and achieving meaningful visibility. Yet, there is a scarcity of research that specifically investigates the relationship between self-determination and the employment outcomes of youth who are blind and deaf.

While there is a growing body of research on disability and employment, the experiences of youth who are deaf or blind, in particular those graduating from the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector, remain under-explored. This is a notable gap considering the critical role TVETs play in preparing individuals for various career paths. Globally, TVET institutions serve as crucial educational establishments that provide practical training and education, equipping individuals with the necessary knowledge and skills for different career paths and occupations (Jagannathan et al., 2019). In recent years in Kenya, there has been a growing focus on expanding access to TVET education and training, to enhance the employability of youth and persons with disabilities (PWDs) (Muzite, 2022). With the introduction of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, issues such as disability were brought to the forefront, fostering greater participation of people with disabilities in the labour market (Agyei-Okyere et al., 2019; Fedulova et al., 2019; Usman & Projo 2021).

Unemployment remains a significant challenge in Africa despite the region's relatively strong economic growth over the past decade (Kett, 2017). The International Disability Alliance (IDA) particularly estimate that unemployment rates for people with disabilities range from

80% to 90% in developing countries and 50% to 70% in developed economies (IDA, 2020). These figures provide a general overview, with minor variations across different geographies. The close association between disability and poverty has long been acknowledged, with disability exacerbating poverty by increasing isolation and economic strain, not only for individuals but also for their families.

In Kenya, the employment process remains challenging for youth who are either blind or deaf, with barriers ranging from lack of reasonable accommodations at work and inaccessible transport to discrimination and negative attitudes about people's potential in the workplace (Jahan & Holloway, 2020). Available evidence reflects a notably high unemployment rate among youth with disabilities (YWDs) in Kenya. Only one in five people with disabilities engaged in livelihood activities are employed, with the majority being self-employed in the informal sector (Ebuenyi et al., 2019). To address the unemployment challenges among youth with disabilities in the country, the government has attempted several structural interventions aimed at increasing the provision and access to training facilities. Key among these has been the elevation of former VTIs of Special Needs to National Technical and Vocational Institutions (SNTVI). Despite such interventions, unemployment rates for youth with disabilities in the country remain staggering and low (NCPWD, 2022 report). This brings to focus, individual-level factors that could play a role in the employment of these demography, particularly self-determination, as this has been widely touted as being pivotal in helping individuals with disabilities overcome barriers to employment and achieve meaningful work engagement (Watson, 2019; Yadav & Chakrabarti, 2022; Boateng et al., 2023). This is mainly about the deaf and blind, who not only face the conventional hurdles of job hunting but also the additional complexities of living with sensory disabilities that impair communication and navigation of the environment. It, however, remains scantily explored in the body of knowledge.

Against this backdrop, this study thus sought to address this gap by examining the nexus between self-determination and employment for youth who are deaf or blind, with a particular focus on their experiences within the TVET framework. Accordingly, the central research question guiding this investigation was: What is the impact of self-determination on employment for youth who are either blind or deaf and are graduates of TVET institutions? To answer this research question, the study sought to gain a comprehensive understanding of how self-determination factors into the employment trajectories of these demographics.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

The study was grounded on the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) developed by Deci and Ryan (1985) and posits that an amalgamation of individual competencies, autonomy and readiness are pillars of effective performance. The study concurs with the propagators of the SDT in that youth who are either blind or deaf have to exert control over their environment and pursue outcomes without giving up. By considering these factors within the framework of the SDT, the study provided valuable insights into the psychosocial mechanisms that impact the employment outcomes of this population, which can inform policies and interventions aimed at improving their access to employment.

Several studies have been conducted pertinent to the nexus between the self-determination of a youth who is blind or deaf and employment, albeit leaving various conceptual, contextual and methodological gaps warranting the present study. In the United States, Watson (2019) extensively explored the connection between self-determination skills and employment outcomes for youth with disabilities. The study findings indicate that goal-setting, self-advocacy, and decision-making significantly influence the likelihood of successful employment. However, a fundamental limitation of the study is its heavy reliance on qualitative approaches, which may limit generalizability. Additionally, while the qualitative approaches may give nuanced experiences pertinent to self-determination skills and employment outcomes, they fall short of establishing causality.

In the Indian context, studies have illuminated self-determination's crucial role in shaping employment opportunities for youth with disabilities. For instance, Yadav and Chakrabarti (2022) have explored this connection. They found that higher levels of self-determination are associated with improved employment prospects. Many studies primarily concentrated on urban areas, potentially overlooking the involvement of those with disabilities residing in rural settings, where access to education and vocational training might be more limited. The present research incorporates a more diverse range of participants to address this gap. It explores the unique challenges and opportunities faced by youth in different geographies as long as they have acquired technical skills.

Studies in Ghana, such as research conducted by Boateng et al. (2023), have highlighted the necessity of self-determination skills in shaping the employment prospects of youth with disabilities. However, these studies have focused on a comprehensive examination of the

accessibility of educational and vocational training opportunities, failing to link the same to employment. A deeper exploration of the employment barriers and facilitators relating to self-determination would complement the existing research. Additionally, studies focusing on particular disability groups would provide valuable insights into how self-determination manifests in different disability categories and its impact on career trajectories for Ghanaian youth with disabilities.

Research in Ethiopia, exemplified by the work of Ayalew et al. (2018), has touched upon self-determination and employment for youth with disabilities. However, there is a gap in understanding how self-determination skills are individualised and their impact on employment outcomes. Mixed-methods studies could provide valuable insights into the trajectory of self-determination and its role in shaping the employment of young individuals with disabilities.

In Kenya, Onsomu et al. (2022) conducted a study on enhancing inclusivity by empowering persons with disabilities. While the desktop study makes valuable recommendations to enhance self-determination among people with disabilities to undertake tasks and challenges, it fails to link the same to employment outcomes. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the present study addresses this gap by providing a more holistic understanding of this complex relationship between self-determination and employment among youth who are either blind or deaf. It helps inform targeted interventions and policies to improve training and, in turn, employment prospects in Kenya for this category of youth.

In Kenya's competitive world, it is important for young individuals to possess not only valuable work skills and competencies but also people skills that enable them to live and work with others. It is crucial for the youth to consistently showcase their abilities in dealing with people and express their needs to potential employers, positioning themselves as a value addition to the workplace rather than a problem.

### **3.0 Research Methodology**

Grounded on the constructivist paradigm, this tracer study adopted the cross-sectional descriptive survey design and mixed-methods research (MMR) to collect and synthesise quantitative and qualitative datasets. The target population for this study was youth who had trained in the four National special needs TVETs and graduated between 2014 and 2018. The

youth had to be either blind or deaf. There were 239 youth who graduated between 2014 and 2018 who are either deaf or blind; another target included 4 administrative officers, one from each institution and 22 employers of the youth. The purpose of this study was to target graduates below 35 years in compliance with the definition of the term youth in the Kenyan legal framework. A complete enumeration sampling method was used in the sampling of TVET administrative officers. Since there were only 4 special needs TVETs, the employer was purposely identified as a study participant for each youth who said they were employed. During data collection, 54 out of 146 TVET graduate youth indicated that they were in employment. This follows that 54 employers were targeted. However, only 22 employers were reached. Survey questionnaires were used for the youth while interview schedules were applied for administrative staff and employers to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data was analysed using statistical methods, including descriptive, bivariate, and multivariate techniques. Regressions were also run on the data to enumerate the relationship or lack of it. Thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data. Content analysis was conducted using the six-phase model proposed by Braun and Clarke (2014); the first phase involved perusing the 22 piecemeal responses from employers to understand the nature and scope of responses and emerging attitude-related issues. This cycle involved the identification of initial themes that were physically written into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet document. These fundamental themes were expanded upon as additional characters became available during coding. This study was conducted in compliance with scientific and ethical best practices. Prior to the study, a research permit was sought from the National Commission for Science Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). Informed consent was sought from the participants, who were informed that their data would only be utilised for academic purposes.

#### **4.0 Results and Discussion**

The aim of this study was to examine whether the self-determination of a youth who is either blind or deaf influences their employment. Table 1 shows that 84.2% of TVET graduate youth who are deaf or blind know what they need while looking for a job. A substantial percentage (84.2%) of participants reported knowing what they needed and were looking for in a job. This reflects a sense of clarity and self-awareness, a foundational aspect of self-determination recognised as pivotal in the transition to employment. However, the study also highlights potential challenges, as slightly over half (58.2%) had specific employment goals, and only 52.1% expressed a proactive approach to securing employment.

In light of the study's findings, the substantial percentage of participants who reported knowing what they need and are looking for in a job aligns with the foundational aspect of self-awareness emphasised in self-determination theory. Scholars such as Wehmeyer et al. (2019) have recognised the importance of self-awareness as a pivotal factor in the transition to employment for individuals with disabilities. The finding also correlates with studies like Lindstrom and Benz (2022), where higher levels of self-competency have been associated with better employment outcomes among individuals with disabilities.

The findings underscore the complexity of the transition process for youth who are blind or deaf, although with technical skills. While self-awareness is a crucial starting point, it must be complemented by goal-setting and proactive actions to translate that awareness into tangible employment outcomes. This suggests that interventions and support mechanisms should be designed to bridge the gap between self-awareness and proactive employment-seeking behaviours.

The results presented in Table 2 show self-reported advocacy levels for TVET youth graduates who are deaf or blind. The results show that 64.4% like speaking for themselves, and 61.6% usually share information about their disability during job application.

The findings regarding self-reported advocacy levels among TVET graduates who are blind or deaf shed light on their communication and self-presentation strategies during the employment-seeking process. Notably, a substantial proportion of participants prefer self-advocacy, with 64.4% indicating that they like speaking for themselves, aligning with self-advocacy principles.

The study's findings align with self-advocacy principles that have been prominently emphasised in the literature on disability empowerment. Scholars like Siperstein et al. (2023) and Jaswal and Akram (2017) have highlighted the significance of self-advocacy as a means for individuals with disabilities to assert their rights, advocate for their needs, and actively participate in decisions related to their lives. The preference for self-advocacy observed in the study underscores the agency and self-determination of these graduates, suggesting that they are actively engaged in advocating for themselves in the employment context.

These findings hold significant implications for both policy and practice. The high prevalence of self-advocacy among TVET graduates who are blind or deaf underscores the importance

of recognizing and respecting their autonomy and decision-making agency during the job-seeking process. Policymakers and employment support services should take into account the preferences and communication strategies of these individuals, ensuring that they are provided with opportunities and environments that facilitate self-advocacy. More time and resources could be spent in personal development of youth who are either blind or deaf as opposed to using resources to advocate to employers on behalf.

The results presented in Table 3 shows self-reported and self-expression competencies of TVET graduate youth who are blind or deaf. The results show that 49.3% can always ask for reasonable accommodations during the job application process.

The results of the study offer significant insights into the self-reported abilities and confidence levels of TVET graduates who are blind or deaf, when it comes to various aspects of the employment-seeking process. The finding that 49.3% of participants feel confident in always asking for reasonable accommodations during a job application process suggests a notable degree of awareness and assertiveness among this group regarding their rights and needs.

The findings regarding self-reported ,self-expression and self-advocacy competencies among TVET graduate youth who are blind or deaf align with the existing literature on disability and employment. Consistent with Jaswal and Akram (2017) and Lindsay et al. (2019), it is notable that a considerable percentage of the participants feel confident in asking for reasonable accommodations during the job application process making it easier for employers to engage them. This finding are of significance as they indicates ability to communicate effectively and hence good interpersonal skills. Effective communication is essential in the workplace for both job performance and social integration. The significance of this result lies in its potential to enhance the prospects of youth who are blind or deaf with in building relationships with colleagues and employers, which can, in turn, contribute to their overall job satisfaction and career progression.

Bivariate analysis using the Pearson Chi-Square test of association was used to examine the relationship among self-presentation, self-advocacy, self-expression, and employment status of TVET graduate youth who are deaf or blind and results presented in Table 4. The results presented in Table 4 show that the variation between employment rates and levels of self-



presentation are statistically significant based on the Pearson's Chi-square ( $p=0.054$ ) meaning that employment increases with increase in self-presentation of TVET graduates who are either blind or deaf. Results also indicate that there is a significant association between self-determination and employment of TVET graduate ( $p=0.002$ ).

The finding of a significant association between self-determination and the employment of TVET graduates aligns with existing literature that underscores the pivotal role of self-determination in the career development and employment outcomes of individuals with disabilities. Scholars Yadav and Chakrabarti (2022) have extensively explored the relationship between self-determination and employment success, emphasizing that self-determination skills play a crucial role in helping individuals with disabilities overcome barriers to employment.

The significant association between self-determination and employment has important implications for employment support services, educators, and policymakers. It highlights the need for tailored interventions and programs that specifically target the development and enhancement of self-determination skills among TVET graduates who are deaf or blind.

The findings revealing that a substantial majority of employers (95.5%) primarily rely on word of mouth for recruiting prospective employees with disabilities, especially the deaf and blind. This is in tandem with the prevailing literature (Hernandez et al., 2019) highlighting the role of informal networks and personal connections in the hiring process for individuals with disabilities. The fact that only a small minority (4 out of 22) of employers utilize alternative methods such as social media and internet tools to reach out to prospective employees reflects a critical gap in leveraging modern, inclusive recruitment strategies. The recruitment methods that the study investigated included telephone interviews, use of CVs, job application forms, occupational tests, and face-to-face interviews. The results from the study revealed that all 22 organizations preferred face-to-face interviews as their primary recruitment method while hiring people with disabilities, especially those that are blind or deaf. Only 3 organizations used CVs in the recruitment process alongside the face-to-face interviews. This reflects a common preference for traditional assessment techniques in the employment process (Fowler et al., 2020).

The reliance on face-to-face interviews may be influenced by a desire to assess not only technical skills but also interpersonal qualities and cultural fit, which can be challenging to gauge through other means (Hausknecht et al., 2021). However, the limited use of CVs alongside face-to-face interviews by only 3 organizations suggests a potential missed opportunity to leverage a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to candidate evaluation. Literature highlights the importance of adapting recruitment methods to accommodate the diverse needs and abilities of individuals with disabilities, including the use of accessible application materials and alternative assessment methods (Bowe et al., 2018).

## **5.0 Conclusion**

Based on the comprehensive findings of this study, several conclusions can be drawn regarding the employment prospects of TVET graduates who are blind or deaf. First and foremost, the study underscores the importance of self-determination in the employment-seeking process for trained youth who are either blind or deaf. The significant association between self-determination and employment outcomes highlights that graduates with higher levels of self-determination are more likely to secure employment. This finding emphasises the need for educational institutions and policymakers to prioritise the development of self-determination skills throughout the educational and skills training journey, empowering graduates with the ability to set goals, advocate for their needs, actively seek job opportunities, develop their presentation skills and enhance communication etiquettes.

Furthermore, the study sheds light on the preferences and strategies employed by these graduates during their job search. The fact that a substantial proportion of participants prefer self-advocacy and are proactive in their approach to securing employment demonstrates their agency and self-confidence. This finding challenges stereotypes and assumptions about individuals with disabilities, highlighting their capabilities and determination. Therefore, employers and work placement programmes and support services must recognize and respect the autonomy of these graduates during the job-seeking process, creating inclusive and accessible environments that accommodate their communication and self-presentation skills rather than usurping this role.

The findings show that employers preferred in-person pre-employment meetings with youth who are blind or deaf, so it's only right to conclude that self-presentation skills and self-advocacy are key parameters that employers use to determine "fit for work". This, coupled

with the referral processes for work that many employers reported using, indicates that self-determination is critical in the access and retention of employment for youth who are blind or deaf.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform and improve inclusive employment practices in the context of technical and vocational education and training. By recognising the importance of self-determination and understanding the preferences and strengths of TVET graduates who are deaf or blind, stakeholders in education, employment, and disability advocacy can develop more effective strategies to support their successful transition to the workforce. To expand knowledge about the issue, future research can delve deeper into the specific self-determination skills closely associated with positive employment outcomes for most youth with disabilities.

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## Appendices

**Table 1: Self-reported self-presentation by TVET graduates who are deaf or blind**

Question	Options	Percent	Number
I know what I need for a job	Always	84.2	123
	Sometimes	15.8	23
	Never	0	0
I know what I am good at	Always	78.8	115
	Sometimes	20.5	30
	Never	0.7	1
I have competencies for the job I want	Always	71.2	104
	Sometimes	28.1	41
	Never	0.7	1
I set goals to get what I want	Always	58.2	85
	Sometimes	39	57
	Never	2.7	4
I am guided on what job to look	Always	30.8	45
	Sometimes	62.3	91
	Never	6.8	10
I always feel like I choose the things I do	Always	47.3	69
	Sometimes	49.3	72
	Never	3.4	5
I choose to do what I have to do	Always	52.1	76
	Sometimes	46.6	68
	Never	1.4	2
I only do work out of interest/ I only do work that interests me	Always	48.6	71
	Sometimes	45.9	67
	Never	5.5	8
I only argue for ideas that I already believe	Always	52.1	76
	Sometimes	45.9	67
	Never	2.1	3

**Table 2: Self-reported self-advocacy by TVET graduates who are deaf or blind**

		Percent	Number
I like speaking for myself	Always	64.4	94
	Sometimes	34.9	51
	Never	0.7	1
I usually share needed information about my disability during a job application	Always	61.6	90
	Sometimes	38.4	56
	Never	0	0
I like to let people know that I am competent in my area of training	Always	0	0
	Sometimes	36.3	53
	Never	63.7	93
I show people my ability	Always	56.2	82
	Sometimes	43.2	63
	Never	0.7	1
I make others appreciate my abilities despite my disability	Always	63	92
	Sometimes	35.6	52
	Never	1.4	2
I can independently request reasonable adjustments at place of work	Always	50	73
	Sometimes	45.9	67
	Never	4.1	6
I usually share needed information about my disability during interviews	Always	56.2	82
	Sometimes	41.8	61
	Never	2.1	3
I know and ask for my rights and privileges	Always	44.5	65
	Sometimes	53.4	78
	Never	2.1	3

**Table 3: Self-Reported Self-Expression by TVET Graduates who are Deaf or Blind**

		Percent	Number
I ask for reasonable accommodation during a job application	Always	49.3	72
	Sometimes	47.9	70
	Never	2.7	4
I send job applications/CVs even when not requested	Always	35.6	52
	Sometimes	46.6	68
	Never	17.8	26
I can speak in public without fear	Always	51.4	75
	Sometimes	45.9	67
	Never	2.7	4
I can express my needs in a social setting	Always	52.7	77
	Sometimes	46.6	68
	Never	0.7	1
I can ask for an attendant or a stranger for something	Always	37	54
	Sometimes	47.3	69
	Never	15.8	23
I can express my displeasure in a situation	Always	47.3	69
	Sometimes	52.7	77
	Never	0	0
I can apologize when I realize being on the wrong	Always	61	89
	Sometimes	39	57
	Never	0	0



**Table 4: Self-Determination and Employment status of TVET graduates who are blind or deaf**

Variable		Not employed	Employed	P-value
Self-presentation	Poor	89%	11%	0.054
	Fair	71%	29%	
	Good	57%	43%	
Self-advocacy	Poor	71%	29%	0.488
	Fair	61%	39%	
	Good	60%	40%	
Self-expression	Poor	72%	28%	0.001
	Fair	81%	19%	
	Good	45%	55%	
Self-determination	Low	73%	27%	0.002
	Average	74%	26%	
	High	46%	54%	