



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

UNEVOC

International Centre
for Technical and Vocational
Education and Training



Assistive technologies for TVET students and employees with disabilities

Promising Practice 2021

Context

COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected global education and training sectors. In Trinidad and Tobago, the economic recession triggered by the impacts of the pandemic has also caused a rift in the workforce. To meet this challenge, the country has looked to its technical and vocational education and training (TVET) systems and those already in the workforce to support a sustainable strategic response.

Remote teaching

Temporary restrictions on movement and physical distancing measures resulting from the pandemic have led to the closure of many TVET institutions and skills development organizations in Trinidad and Tobago. As remote education and training become the norm, there is a high expectation that TVET teachers and instructors will be able to deliver effective and relevant online training programmes.

Learners with disabilities

Providing remote TVET teaching can be challenging for education providers, especially when it comes to ensuring courses are equally accessible to learners with special needs and disabilities. Similarly, providing employees with disabilities with the right tools and technology to do their jobs can be challenging when work is undertaken remotely.

Objectives

The pilot programme set a target of training 25 TVET educators and WFD leaders. The long-term objectives are to:

- ensure everyone, regardless of physical ability, has access to quality technical and vocation education and training
- provide all TVET educators and WFD practitioners with skills to plan their working environments so that persons with disabilities have reasonable space to work and have the appropriate tools to carry out their vocation
- promote this initiative as an example to other stakeholders to encourage them to re-examine their strategies for supporting persons with disabilities in skills training and the workplace more broadly
- create a space for knowledge exchange between TVET educators and WFD leaders to share best practices in working with persons with disabilities
- develop open educational resources to enable TVET institutions and WFD practitioners to enhance their practices

Overview

Implemented by: The University of the West Indies (UWI), St. Augustine Campus, School of Education

Where: Trinidad and Tobago

Themes: Learners with disabilities; Distance learning

Status: Programme active since February 2021

The University of the West Indies (UWI) aims to provide a high-quality teaching and learning environment, facilitate critical thinking, and produce graduates equipped to innovate regionally and impact globally.

Mission statement:

To advance learning, create knowledge and foster innovation for the positive transformation of the Caribbean and the wider world.

Online assistive technologies

The UWI, St. Augustine Campus, School of Education, embarked on a pilot project to train TVET teachers, instructors and Workforce Development (WFD) leaders in the use of online assistive technologies to support TVET students and employees with disabilities.



Inside the Assistive Technology Bus. © The UWI

The training programme

The programme trained participants in the use of assistive technologies and the provision of appropriate workplace environments for persons with disabilities (PWDs). Training was conducted online via the use of collaborative digital spaces to allow participants to practice using the assistive technology software. Participants were then required to videotape their engagement with the software and upload it to the online classroom space provided.

The following topics were addressed in the sessions:

1. Introduction to disability
2. Disability etiquette in skills training and the workplace
3. Introduction to assistive technology
4. Simulation exercises using assistive devices
5. Inclusion of persons with disabilities in skills training and the workplace
6. Practical use of assistive devices and software

In the face-to-face practical component, which will be carried out as soon as COVID-19 restrictions are lifted, participants will be able to use the assistive technology in workshops. The workshops will be held in an "Assistive Technology Bus" provided by the Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme (YTEPP) Limited. The bus has been refurbished and retrofitted with cutting edge equipment and software to support people who are visually and audibly impaired as well as those who require wheelchairs. The bus will also serve as a platform for industry certification for persons with disabilities as well as a workforce assessment centre for those who need certification.

Another crucial aspect of the training was a series of webinars that provided teachers and the public with information on assistive technologies and reasonable workspace environments. The webinars focused on the importance of assistive technology in skills training and the workplace and the inclusion of persons with disabilities. These activities created a space for knowledge exchange between TVET educators and WFD leaders to share best practices in working with persons with disabilities.

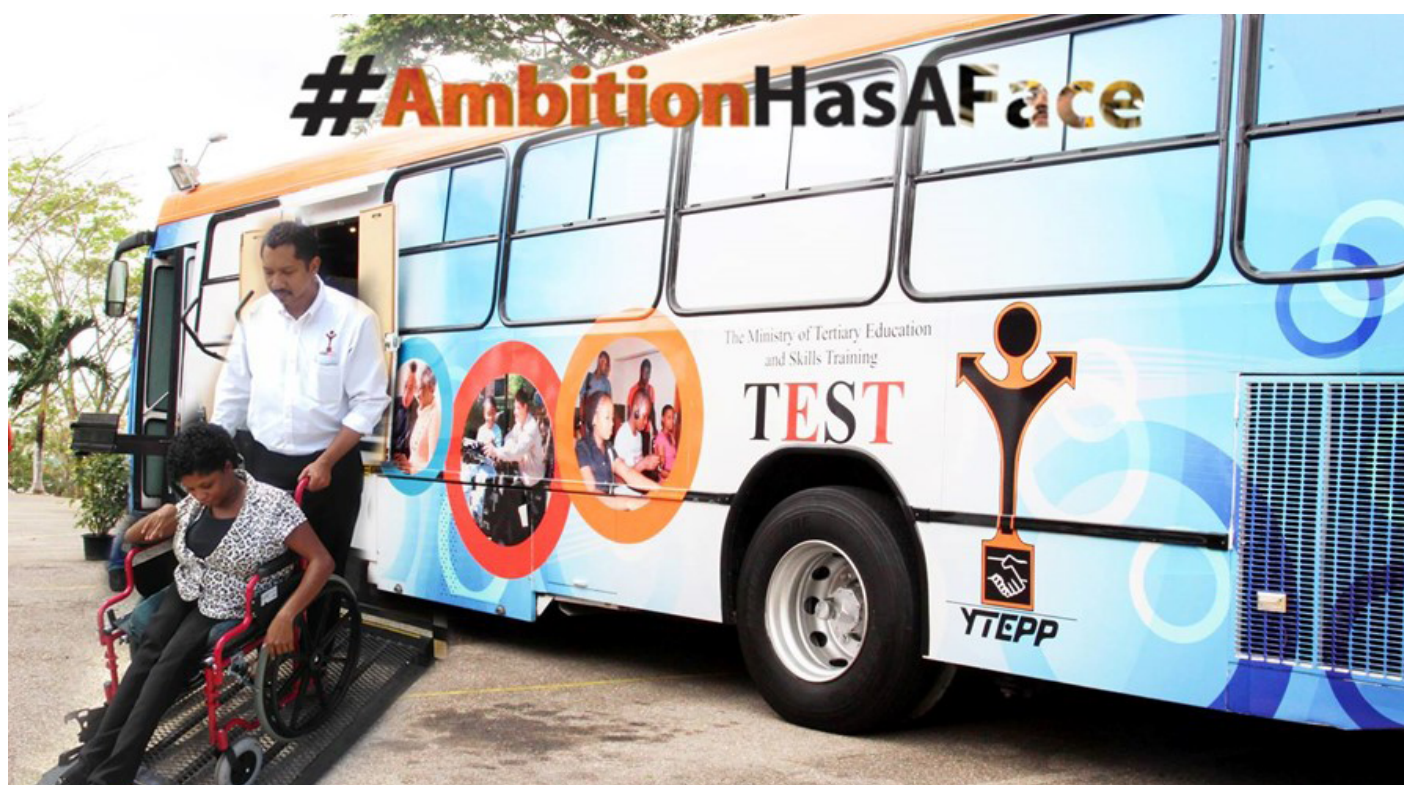
Outcomes and impact

Positive feedback

The timeliness of the project was highlighted by participants at the webinars and those who completed the training programme. In addition, several employers asked for capacity building for their staff to facilitate the seamless transition for PWDs into the workforce.

Programme expansion

The pilot training programme was so well received that TVET and WFD practitioners have called for its continuation and expansion. Human resources personnel from the private sector have also been in contact for assistance with reconceptualizing workspace planning in their organizations to ensure inclusiveness.



Insights

Providing persons with disabilities with the necessary tools and workspaces for their empowerment is a central cog in any development landscape. Societies must work to make persons with disabilities feel included and offer equal opportunities for them to participate in nation building.

One critical insight that came from this activity is the importance of sensitizing the general public on this issue. The discourse from the webinars also pointed to the necessity for further work on the empowerment of persons with disabilities and the provision of relevant skills to enhance their economic and social capital.

The future

The UWI understands the importance of inclusion in the development of any resilient community. There is an urgent need to build the capacity of personnel to facilitate the integration of PWDs in skills training and the workforce.

Therefore, to ensure the sustainability of the initiative, the UWI will continue to offer training to TVET educators and WFD practitioners on the use of assistive technology and the planning of reasonable accommodation for PWDs. The School of Education has also developed a training manual that will be offered as an open educational resource.

Learn more

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To learn more about the UWI School of Education, St. Augustine Campus, visit:
sta.uwi.edu or sta.uwi.edu/fhe/education

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Learn more on our website at:
<http://www.unevoc.unesco.org/promisingpractices>

Questions or comments? Contact our team at: unevoc-pp@unesco.org

