

Achieving Sustainable Inclusive Education in Nigeria through Technical and Vocational Education for Learners with Hearing Impairment.

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Abstract

The paper examines ways of achieving sustainable inclusive education through provision of vocational and technical education. The issue of contemporary developments in the world such as globalization, sustainable development goals (SDGs) among others was critically discussed and it was justified that there is the need to make changes to the inclusive education as presently being practised in Nigeria so as to integrate the hearing impaired into national development. Also, the paper examines the main concept of inclusive education and its benefits as well as its current state in Nigeria. The nature and contents of vocational and technical education was equally discussed. Ways through which inclusive education can be adjusted to suit the attainment of sustainable development was eventually suggested.

Introduction

Most developing countries such as Nigeria have at the root of their underdevelopment, a myriad of factors contributing to such. These factors, according to Enobong (2007) includes poor economic management practices, lack of adequate infrastructure, lack of skilled human resources to develop and combine resources for optimal results, corruption, non-recognition of benefits of globalization, prevalence of poverty and sustainable livelihood, inability of government to deal with unsustainable pattern of consumption and production, poor governance and most importantly, lack of quality and sustainable education that can cater for the future. A critical look at all these aforementioned factors will reveal that they are all tied to provision of a quality, sound and sustainable education.

Education is a process of developing an individual into a responsible, purposeful, innovative, creative and useful human being. It aims at developing the innate potentials of an individual to the optimal level which makes him useful to himself and his society. Education is the most suitable way of developing the potentials of an individual. Access to quality education has been identified as an effective way of fighting poverty and underdevelopment (Fafunwa, 2003). Thus, education is crucial and very vital for development, starting from pre-primary to secondary and tertiary institutions. Nigeria, in this 22nd century, need to be involved in technological and scientific advancement currently going on in the world. This can only be attained through a sound technical, science and vocational education.

The need to ensure that every learner irrespective of physical disability, tribe, religion, age, location etc, is given equal access to quality education justifies the introduction and subsequent adoption of inclusive education in Nigeria. Inclusive education is that type of Education in which regular and special needs learners are brought together in the same academic environment and classroom for the purpose of learning. The hearing impaired, being an integral part of the society are thus expected to benefit immensely from this project by having access to quality education at all levels. While there are some evidences of positive effects of inclusion of students with hearing

impairment, opponents of this idea maintain that there are less evidences of the overall benefit of inclusion on the classmates of learners with hearing impairment (Fletcher, 2010).

The attainment of educational goals for learners with hearing impairment in Nigeria has always been faced with challenges. These chronic challenges are usually noticeable irrespective of the educational system adopted in teaching these learners. The introduction and adoption of inclusive education has been expected to bridge these gaps by addressing these challenges. However, there is the need to reconsider the policy of educating learners with hearing impairment with adequate skills that will enhance their employability or automatically gives them an option of being self-employed. Thus, there is the need to modify the policy of inclusive education as presently constituted by enriching it with vocational and technical education.

Inclusive Education and Sustainable Development in Nigeria

On September 25th 2005, countries under UNESCO adopted a set of goals to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all as part of a new sustainable development agenda (UNESCO, 2005). Each goal has specific targets to be achieved over the next 15 years. For the goals to be reached, everyone needs to do their part: governments, the private sector, civil societies, professional bodies, and the ordinary citizens. Among the goals are poverty eradication and quality education. The need for quality education covers all categories of learners including those with special needs of which the hearing impaired are an integral part. Thus, the concept of inclusive education was designed to cover this angle.

According to Obani (2006), inclusive education is the most current system of providing education for children with special needs. This entails the acceptance of all children without exception or discrimination into the neighbourhood school that they should ordinarily attend if disabilities does not exist. It also implies that there has to be some adoptions and modification in the regular schools in terms of administrative strategies, curriculum, learning materials, infrastructure, personnel and methods of approach in order to accommodate the special learning needs of children with their forms of disabilities and difficulties in learning. All these according to Nkwoagba (2013) are geared towards including children, youths and adults with special needs into their homes and the general society starting from the school.

Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (2002) as cited in Okobah (2007) defines inclusive education as a programme for all children and young people with or without disabilities or difficulties learning together in regular schools, colleges and universities with appropriate network. The aim of inclusive education is not to erase differences in children but to enable all children to belong to the same educational community, while at the same time eliminating social exclusion arising from attitudes and responses to diversity in race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender and ability (Ainscow, 2004).

The goal of inclusive education differs from previously held notions of “integration” and “mainstreaming”, which is concerned principally with disability and “special education needs” and implied accommodation of all categories of learners in the classroom (Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia, 2014). Inclusion is a step further in mainstreaming, as it presents a means “by which a school attempts to respond to all pupils as individuals, by reconsidering and structuring its curricular organization and provision, and allocating resources to enhance equality of opportunity and through this process, the school builds its capacity to accept all pupils from the local community who wish to attend, and in doing so, reduces the need to exclude pupils” (Sebba & Sachdev, 1997).

Inclusive education is concerned with minimizing and removing barriers to access, participation and learning for all children, but especially for those who have been socially discriminated because of poverty, disability, gender, religion, ethnicity or any inequalities

(UNESCO, 2006). Researchers are of the opinion that Inclusion has academic and social benefits for all students, whether with or without disabilities, such as increased communication and social interaction opportunities, age-appropriate models of behaviour skills, more active participation in the school community, individualized education goals, as well as access to the rich core curriculum (Ajuwon, 2009 & Nkwoagba 2013). Inclusion recognizes that all students are learners who benefit from a meaningful, challenging, and appropriate curriculum and differentiated instruction techniques that address their unique strengths and needs (Salend, 2005).

The notion of inclusive education was initially thought to be a concept in Nigerian educational system. However, inclusive education has since then witnessed some tremendous improvements in the last decade despite cultural, social-economic, and political constraints (Eskay, 2009).

The rate at which countries of the world accept inclusive education varies. While advanced countries of the world have gone beyond policy making and have adopted full inclusion in their education system, other developing countries like Nigeria are yet to make adequate provision for the education of their physically handicapped children. Garuba (2003) observed that no concrete step has been taken with regards to inclusive education in Nigeria. He further pointed out that even at the policy level; integration remains the focus of planning special education programmes.

Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria

The issue of vocational and technical education is receiving a lot of attention in Nigeria today due to the need for development of skilled manpower in science, technological and vocational fields. Technical and vocational education is used as a comprehensive term in the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life (FGN, 2004). Agapu & Andural (2007) as well as Momoh (2012) define vocational education as a form of education whose primary purpose is to prepare persons for employment in recognized occupation. In the same vein he defines technical education as a post-secondary vocational training programme which the major purpose is the production of technicians.

The terms technical education and vocational education are often used interchangeably but, they are separate and distinct terms. For the purpose of this paper there is the need to do some clarifications. Vocational education refers to skill based programmes which are designed for skill acquisition at lower level of education. Vocational education programmes focus on specific vocations for entry into defined workplace. Technical education, in the other hand is not designed for any particular vocation but provides general technical knowledge. This type of education prepares people for entry into recognized occupation at a higher level but usually lower than the first degree. In fact technical and vocational education is usually a merger of technical education and vocational education i.e the inclusion of basic technical and scientific knowledge with the skill based vocational programme.

According to Uwaifo (2009), technical education is the training of technically oriented personnel who are to be the initiators, facilitators and implementers of technologically development of a nation. In his own opinion, this training of its citizens on the need to be technologically literate would eventually lead to self reliance and sustainability. He observed that technical education more than any other profession has direct impact on the development of the country.

Again, technical education contributes so much to the development of a country ranging from electrical and electronics technology, metal work technology, mechanical/automobile technology, building technology, woodwork technology and so on. Technical education is practical oriented education which makes it unique in its content and approach thereby demanding special attention.

However, despite all the glaring contributions of technical and vocational education in our nation, Nigeria is yet to accord this type of education the attention it deserves. This is one of the major reasons for the rising unemployment, poverty and unabated crimes in the society today. This paper is an attempt to explore some issues, challenges and the way forward for attaining a sustainable inclusive education for the hearing impaired through vocational and technical education in Nigeria. This is necessary due to the fact that vocational/technical education is designed to offer people the opportunity of improving themselves in their general proficiency, especially in relation to their present or future occupation.

Also, May, Ajayi & Arogundade (2007) observed that technical and vocational education are very much still neglected in the aspect of adequate funding, personnel, modern facilities, staff motivation which consequently are robbing the country of the economic development to be contributed by graduates of technical/vocational education. Asogwa and Diogu (2007) maintained that there is an urgent need for the Nigeria's attention to be redirected towards self reliant and sustainable means of livelihood which technical education provides.

Continuously, Oranu (2010) also observed that there are many factors that have contributed to the ever rising demand for skills in the labour market which include the following; technological and organizational change, trade, deregulation of key industries and the decline of unions. It can thus be stated that too much emphasis on University education in Nigeria has always reduced the economic opportunities of those who are more work oriented than academics (Ojimba, 2012). It must however be noted that not everybody needs a University education as there is the need to focus more on technical and vocational education through establishment of more technical colleges in Nigeria.

The contemporary state of education in Nigeria is having a direct influence on vocational and technical education in that emphasis is more on acquisition of university degrees rather than technical and vocational education. This is evidence in the scanty enrolment obtainable in most technical schools across the country. The federal science and technical colleges are witnessing more enrolments in the science arm compared to the technical section. All these point to the fact that technical education is no more attractive to the youths as obtainable in the past.

There are numerous challenges facing vocational technical education and training which is affecting negatively both our national life and development. Among the challenges are: Poor Public Perception and Apathy to Vocational Education, Government Lukewarm Attitudes/Poor Funding, Shortage of Qualified Vocational Technical Teachers, Lack of Adequate Equipment and Training Infrastructure, Non-Uniformity of Course Contents among others. Also, according to (Eskay & Angie, 2013) some of these challenges includes ; Inadequate plans for the identifications of children with hearing impairment, lack of access to such schools by those in the remote areas as majority of these schools are located in urban areas, parental socioeconomic status, inadequate funding, lack of educational facilities and resources, and the unfavourable attitude of the society towards children with hearing impairment among others(Eskay& Angie, 2013).

Vocational and Technical Education as a Tool for Attainment of Sustainable Inclusive Education for the Hearing Impaired in Nigeria

The need for a sustainable inclusive education for learners with hearing impairment requires a modification to the existing inclusive educational practice adopted by the federal government in Nigeria today. The idea of educating learners with special needs in the regular classroom without any discrimination is a laudable project capable of opening door of equal educational attainment among the hearing impaired and their hearing counterpart. However, the need to curbs the current state of unemployment among the hearing impaired as well as enable them to participates in national

development and attainment of the sustainable development goals requires a change of approach from theory to practical.

Vocational education has the potential role of transforming the nation economically and technologically. However vocational education's ability to meet this challenging potential is frustrated by the public lack of awareness of the true value of vocational and technical education to the nation.

Vocational and technical education has been accorded very low image in the country. It has been regarded as education specifically meant for those who could not meet the rigours of academics in the classroom, that is, the dropouts. This notion needed to be corrected by giving more priority to those with technical and vocational skills as they are the most viable mean of bridging the gap of shortage of manpower in national development. To this end, the inclusive schools catering for the hearing impaired need to be equipped with vocational and technical education skills acquisition human and material resources. It is a well known notion that academic performance of learners with hearing impairment is below expectation, thus, to avoid a situation whereby these children will become a liability to the society at large, they should be exposed to vocational and technical education.

Vocational and technical education always serve as a motivating force in individuals to work for the nation because it stimulates technological and industrial development through the production of competent and honest workers who are capable of utilizing the abundant natural and human resources available in a country for economy and industrial growth and development. The implication of this is that learners with hearing impairment will be motivated to works for the technological advancement of the country rather than being seen as weaklings to be spoonfed by the nation. Being viewed as having skills in vocational and technical education only is not an excuse to be redundant. Rather it should be an avenue to prove the society wrong in their negative perception of the special needs.

Conclusion

The policy of inclusive education as presently obtained in the country is not capable of achieving the much expected social transformation and full inclusion unless a number of rescue measures are undertaken to ensure that learners with hearing impairment and other categories of the special needfully benefit from the system. One of such possibilities is the need to give more attention to vocational and technical education in inclusive and technical schools in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are hereby made to facilitates the attainment of sustainable inclusive education through vocational and technical education for learners with hearing impairment in Nigeria:

- i) There should be full implementation of policy on inclusion while the unproductive policy of segregation and integration should be gradually discarded.
- ii) Government should boost the image of vocational and technical education in Nigeria by establishing more technical colleges that fits current trends in national development such as globalization, ICT, innovative enterprises etc.
- iii) The existing technical colleges too can be upgraded to serve this purpose.

- iv) The parents, guardians, deaf community, students, and other stakeholders need to be educated on the benefits of anchoring educational policy development on technical and vocational education.
- v) The Nigerian Deaf community should be actively involved in the campaign to deabuse their mind on the wrong notion that technical and vocational education is meant for the dropouts and disabled.
- vi) There is also the need to matching VTE Policies with Needs Assessment and Proper Planning to corresponds with contemporary developments in the world.
- vii) There is the need to engage in massive staff trainings in the fields that are mentioned in the SDGs. This is to ensure that there are enough hands to train these children in new fields.
- viii) There should be provision of workshop and laboratories to enables teachers and students practiced the skills using a replica of what should be obtained in the workplace.
- ix) There should be an increase in the amount of money budgeted for inclusive education annually as the attention being given to it is too inadequate to achieve the SDG goals.

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