



Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education in Promoting Life-Long Opportunity for Nigerians

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ABSTRACT

A study was carried out on inclusive and equitable quality education in promoting life-long opportunity for all Nigerians. Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) becomes a channel through which a lifelong opportunity can be modelled for the development of any society. TVET is a necessary tool which can be used to ensure inclusion and quality equitable education which will make a country a viable and technological driven economy. This gives opportunity to all citizens, irrespective of gender, physical and economic status to be able to contribute independently to the growth and development of the nation. The deployment of Technical Vocational Education and Training will facilitate achievement of inclusive education in Nigeria which will in turn create opportunity for all categories of persons. The following recommendations were made: TVET should be seen as a process that is capable of transforming citizens with creative problem-solving skills, scientific and social literacy and commitment to engage in profitable venture; the government should develop training programmes that aim to improve productivity and employability to ensure equality of opportunity that enhances gender equity in TVET; parents should ensure that their children/wards acquire the necessary skills needed and the teacher should give students an equal chance to learn in the way that best supports their learning style and by creating opportunity for underprivileged and underserved students.

KEYWORDS: Education; Inclusive, Quality, Equitable Education; TVET

Introduction

Education is seen as a veritable tool in human development. It has different connotation from schooling. Education deals with the total process of human learning by which knowledge is imparted, faculties are trained and different skills are developed. On the other hand, schooling is just one medium through which education can be provided and made accessible. Education is also defined as the act or process of educating or applying discipline on the mind or a process of character transformation. Education is a dynamic instrument of change which is expected to affect or condition the social behaviour of the person being educated.

Gbadegesin (2010) defined education as that process of physical and mental culture whereby a man's personality is developed to the fullest as he identified literacy as the foundation on which an edifice of sound education may be built. Drawing distinction between education and literacy, he submitted that while literacy is an important aspect of education, it is not its equivalence and it may jeopardize the object of true education, which is the full development of the entire personality of a human being. By implication, education must be able to have an impact on both physical and mental outcome. By physical, the learner should have the ability to manipulate skills and produce results which can contribute to the need of the society in which he belongs. By mental, the learner's cognitive development during the process of acquisition should be such that can think differently to invent the things which have not existed around his environment and also bring innovation to those aspects of life which are needed for the survival and growth of the society which he belongs.

Equitable quality education is sacrosanct in all spheres of life seeking an even development of its members. Given this importance, it is pertinent that all hands be on deck to ensure that they are properly instituted in the Nigerian educational system. Education itself, according to the Fourth National Development Plan, is the most important instrument for change and the most important resource for development. Hence, the Nigerian Philosophy of education states that:

- a) Education is an instrument for national development. To this end, the formulation of ideas, their integration for national development, and the interaction of persons and ideas are all aspects of education
- b) Education fosters the worth and development of the individual, for each individual's sake, and for the general development of the society
- c) Every Nigerian child shall have a right to equal educational opportunities irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities, each according to his/her ability

d) There is need for functional education for the promotion of a progressive, united Nigeria. To this end, school programmes need to be relevant, practical and comprehensive, while interest and ability should determine the individual's direction in education. (FRN, Reviewed National Policy on Education, 2013).

Equity in education aims to provide equal opportunity to all students to develop valuable skills and knowledge that help them live a full life and contribute to society. To achieve this goal, educators are tasked with reworking systems of learning that exist on both the school and district levels to ensure this new approach is adopted from the top down. The new system is then built on fairness and inclusion, with safeguards such as interventions and resources built in to make sure every student has every opportunity to achieve their academic goals.

Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) becomes a channel through which a lifelong opportunity can be modelled for the development of any society. TVET is a necessary tool which can be used to ensure inclusion and quality equitable education which will make a country a viable and technological driven economy. This gives opportunity to all citizens, irrespective of gender, physical and economic status to be able to contribute independently to the growth and development of the nation.

TVET is meant to prepare beneficiaries for employment in recognized occupations by including skills, knowledge and attitude required for utilizing the natural resources needed for economic development of a nation and for their own self-improvement. It involves manual use of hands as practical skills, competencies and specific work habits that demand commitment, high articulation to design construct, maintain and repair technological goods. TVET ensures that all people have access to quality education and lifelong learning opportunities. An efficient TVET will ensure that this takes place. This will show when youths and adults in formal and informal education and training go through TVET. This does focuses on the acquisition of foundational and higher-order skills; greater and more equitable access to technical and vocational education and training and higher education; training throughout life; and the knowledge, skills and values needed to function well and contribute to society

Concept of Education

Education is a life-long process. It encompasses all aspects of life, be it physical, social or spiritual environment. It is a continuous process. Life is a continuous process of growth and development and so education is also a continuous process which begins from womb to tomb. An individual learns through his experiences, which are acquired throughout his life. Education is not merely collection of some information. It is acquisition of experiences through life in the social and natural environment. It is the development of all those capacities in an individual, which makes him to control his environment and fulfill his possibilities.

Education is a concept that does not lend itself to a clear-cut definition. This is because it is a lifelong process, starting before we begin school and ongoing for life. Its definition may also differ depending on the perspectives of those who are trying to define it. Leonard, Collins and Felix (2014) defined education as the development of the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domain and abilities of an individual for optimal function and performance in the society. The individual has to be helped to maximize his mental, emotional and psychological abilities which will be beneficial to him and the society in which he belongs. Itari and Ugbe (2018) defined education as a process of acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and experiences. They further stressed that education is seen as all experience acquired in the process of living, acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitude and experiences in institutions of learning and as a relatively organized learning activity intended to make some persons (be they adults, youths or children) learn. This presupposes that the teacher/facilitator, learner/student, content/ programme and method must be present in the learning situation.

Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is all about the children coming together to learn in the same classroom, using materials appropriate to their various needs, and participating in the same lessons and recreation. In an inclusive school, children with disabilities do not study in separate classes; instead, the teaching methods, instructional aides, textbooks, and the school environment are designed in such a way that girls and boys with a range of abilities and disabilities including physical, sensory, and intellectual and mobility impairments can be included in the same class. Shaw went further to say that, inclusive education includes all learners, but it may be interpreted differently according to the context. For example, it covers children excluded on the basis of language, gender, ethnicity, disability and other factors. The term inclusion captures in one word, an all-embracing societal ideology (Ikpi, 2019).

Quality Education

Quality education is a crucial tool for improving the prospects of higher income levels for individuals, and for the economic growth of nations. Goal 4 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is focused on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting life-long learning opportunities for all. However, in low and middle-income countries like Nigeria, many children do not have access to quality education. Quality education on its own can be seen as relative term because what constitute quality education vary from country to country based on their economic resources, value system, educational goals and philosophies among others. Quality education improves the quality of the work force by raising the levels of its skills and efficiency. Quality education gives a nation access to the world's body of knowledge, hence the adoption and adaptation of the reigning technology to specific environment is facilitated. By and large the general outcome of quality education is a progressive increase in productivity and efficiency.

The practice anchors on the notion that every child should be an equally valued member of the school culture. In other words, children with disabilities benefit from learning in a regular classroom, while their peers without disabilities gain from being exposed to children with diverse characteristics, talents and temperaments (Ikpi, 2019). It could also be seen as a place to prepare the special children to participate as a full student to acquire knowledge and skills to contribute to the development of the society through engaging in entrepreneurial practices (Ochai, 2011).

Equitable Education

Equitable education is the pursuit of creating an educational system that caters to students of all kinds and develops their educational experience accordingly. This means that no matter what a student's background, language, race, economic profile, gender, learning capability, disability or family history, each student has the opportunity to get the support and resources they need to achieve their educational goals. Similarly, equity in education is seen when students of different races and ethnic groups are able to see examples of people of their race and community around them in the classroom. History lessons, story problems, and books that are inclusive and show all different types of people are key to helping students of different races feel that equity in the classroom (Western Governor University, 2021).

Equity in education aims to provide equal opportunity to all students to develop valuable skills and knowledge that help them live a full life and contribute to society. To achieve this goal, educators are tasked with reworking systems of learning that exist on both the school and district levels to ensure this new approach is adopted from the top down. The new system is then built on fairness and inclusion, with safeguards such as interventions and resources built in to make sure every student has every opportunity to achieve their academic goals.

There are several ways that teachers can work to identify underserved students in their classroom. There are a few groups that typically qualify as underserved populations for students, and teachers need to understand what these groups are so they are able to help students in these populations be successful.

According to Western Governor University (2021), groups that typically qualify as underserved include:

- Racial/ethnic minorities. This typically includes all students who are not Caucasian. Teachers need to understand that racial and ethnic minority students typically are considered underserved and can benefit from equity in the classroom. Helping racial and ethnic minority students make connections to their own race, ethnicity, and community can help empower them as they learn.
- Low income. Schools that are from lower-income areas or specific students that come from lower-income families need teachers who understand equity in education. Lower income students may have less access to resources and opportunities, and equity in education can help make up for those deficiencies.
- First-generation students. Students who have parents who have lower education levels or no education are often considered an underserved population. These students can greatly benefit from teachers who are able to help them overcome the barriers of having family who haven't been through the same school system they are trying to navigate.
- Students with learning disabilities. Students who struggle with learning disabilities require teachers who are able to use equity in education to help them close the gap. Teachers who are able to give specialized attention, cater lesson plans, and work to meet goals are key for students who struggle to learn.

Equity in education is a complex and critical issue to help all students thrive in a classroom setting. While there isn't a simple solution or easy answer, every teacher can work to identify underserved students and increase equity each day in their classroom. Teachers who are focused on promoting equity are critical to the success of each and every student. As an educator, understanding and focusing on equity in schools is a critical way to make the lives of each student better (Western Governor University, 2021).

Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

TVET, according to Mar (2011), is defined as "an encompassing term referring to all areas of the educational process that, in addition to general education, involves:

- a) The study of technologies and other related sciences.
- b) The attainment of practical skills, knowledge, attitudes, and understanding relating to occupations in different sectors of social and economic life.
- c) A means of training for occupational engagements and for efficient participation in the labor world.
- d) An area of lifelong learning and training for effective citizenship.
- e) A tool for enhancing environmentally appropriate sustainable development.
- f) A method of improving poverty reduction."

According to the UNESCO International Centre for TVET (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2019), “Technical and Vocational Education and Training is involved with the acquisition of skills, competencies, and knowledge for the world of work. TVET is an incredibly diverse sub-sector of education and training. It comprises formal, nonformal, and informal learning. It develops skills and knowledge from basic to advanced levels and shapes people’s attitudes. It takes place across a wide range of institutional settings, including schools, public and private vocational institutes, tertiary education institutions, community projects, at home, and in the workplace in both the formal and informal economies.” TVET harnesses and improves skills for innovation, working, lifelong learning, and living, as well as for a contribution to human, socio-economic, environmental, and technological aspects of development.

Similarly, TVET is structured as a set of approaches to learning, both to prepare students for the world-of work, for well-being later in adult life. Additionally, TVET can contribute significantly to skills development and also to human resource strategies and policies that are targeted to serve the different needs of the national and international labor markets. In particular, as the experience of numerous countries shows, successful TVET can serve as an effective function in skills development, both traditionally and in new trades and industries. It can also build societal, group, and individual re-adjustment after catastrophe and conflicts and strengthens resilience and social capital (Ogwu, 2018).

Technical and vocational education is one of the easiest way to get away from poverty and improve your skill. In addition to achieving the following sustainable development goals: goal 4, goal 5, goal 8, goal 9 and goal 10. These includes:

- (1). end poverty in all its forms everywhere
- (2). promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth
- (3). full and productive employment and decent work for all
- (4). reduce inequality within and among countries, ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all will be achieved with effective and efficient TVET (Ogwu, 2018).

All these SDGs and the main trust of our education polices and regulatory framework in Nigeria will go a long way in assisting the human development of the society and the country. TVET is a planned program of courses and learning, experiences that begins with exploration of career options, supports basic academic and life skills, and enables achievement of high academic standards, leadership, preparation for industry-defined work, and advanced and continuing education. The mandate of TVET is to provide individuals with learning experiences and training that equip them with skills to manipulate their natural environment and nurture development for their immediate community and the nation in general.

Increasing Equality through TVET

Equality in this context is a situation where women and men have equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and potentials and are able to contribute their quota equally to national political, economic, social and cultural development and benefit equally from the results. Odekunle 2018, defined gender equity as the proportion of shared resources between men and women, which some school of thought believe might not be achieved in this generation because, of some cultural, economic, political, psychological and social factors. Gender equity demands that the underlying causes of discrimination be identified and removed in order to give men and women equal opportunities.

In Nigeria gives preference to male children as the heirs of the family name. The blueprint of women education identifies certain problems in relation to the education of women among socio-cultural factors, these include: early marriage, cost of education, economic factor, school location patterns especially in urban and rural areas, opportunity cost of formal education of parents, time spent on household activities, sex, stereotyping in occupational choices, curriculum and instructional materials among so many others socio-cultural factors has been a constraint to women education especially technical education in Nigeria. There are some traditional roles assigned to male and females for instance, for females, nursing, teaching, cooking, cleaning, etc. for the male’s sciences, engineering, welding, mechanical works, etc. The masculine image associated with science and technical courses has been attributed to be one of the reasons for non-orientation of girls in those fields and so women avoid occupations that are exclusively meant for men for fear of being discriminated against (United Nations Economic Scientific Cultural Organisation - UNESCO, 2019). This may have come from the fact that socially and culturally, women are taking to be weaker sex especially when the task involve demands high man power input.

Some decades ago, it was observed that there were more males than females seeking and acquiring technological skills. This did not augur well for the nation’s development especially the economy as stipulated by the Federal Ministry of Education (2014) goal of technical education. However, the story has now changed. Women are really measuring up virtually in every aspect of human endeavor. The objectives would be achieved by producing and ensuring high quality and quantity of human resource production of adequate human resources which entails equipping the youth both male and female with employability and productive skills which will make them to have a sustainable and reliable livelihood. There can be no meaningful development in Nigeria if girls and the people living with disabilities are deprived of opportunity to acquire technical skills which will make both the teeming population and the nation to be better-off.

Conclusion

Inclusive education remains the inevitable tool in achieving equitable quality education in Technical Vocational Education and Training in order to provide opportunities that would serve the generality of the Nigerian citizens. Little wonder the utilization of TVET among the disables indeed facilitates the achievement and awareness of inclusive education in Nigeria, as this has drastically reduced the number of persons with disabilities who were sorely

dependent on the government. The acquisition of such knowledge makes a disabled but creative mind self-reliant and easily employable thereby eradicating inequality syndrome among the youths. Though such knowledge is still but struggling to survive as a result of the glaring setbacks because of negative perspectives towards TVET. To this end, it is in order to conclude that deployment of Technical Vocational Education and Training will facilitate achievement of inclusive education in Nigeria which will in turn create opportunity for all categories of persons.

Recommendations

To improve the inclusion and creating equal quality education, TVET is a veritable tool which will gradually increase employability of the graduates at home and abroad with special focus on reducing poverty and improving the quality of life for the majority of the population. Improving the availability and quality of TVET plays a vital role in attaining stability and dignity. As the market demand for skilled workforce increases daily, thousands of students should enroll in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutes to become skilled workers in a bid to create a lifelong opportunity for all. To achieve this, the following recommendations are made:

1. TVET should be seen as a process that is capable to transform citizens with creative problem-solving skills, scientific and social literacy and commitment to engage in profitable venture which will make every category of person productive and important.
2. The government should develop training programmes that aim to improve productivity and employability to ensure equality of opportunity that enhances gender equity in TVET.
3. Parents should ensure that their children/wards acquire the necessary skills needed as this will reduce, to the barest minimum, the rate of vices prevalent in the society.
4. The teacher should give student an equal chance to learn in the way that best supports their learning style and by creating opportunity for underprivileged and underserved students so they are able to overcome their shortcomings.

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