RE-FOCUSED THE EDUCATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES TOWARDS
INDEPENDENT LIVING THROUGH VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

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Abstract
This paper looks at persons with disabilities (PWDs) as bonafide citizens of this
great nation and considers their challenges as they struggle to meet up with life
demands. It expounds the fact that for meaningful and independent living, the
education of PWDs needs to be properly repositioned. For this noble objective to
be achieved, the persons with disabilities have to be more exposed to Vocational
and technical education than liberal education for the acquisition of saleable skills
for self-reliance. The paper also explains among other things, the concept of
disability and persons with disability, concept of vocational and Technical
education (VTE), vocational and technical education for persons with disabilities,
inclusive learning for persons with disabilities in VTE. Finally, recommendations
were made that government at all levels, should provide zero interest loans for
the graduates of VTE programmes in order to establish their own trades.

Introduction
Education is widely perceived and acknowledged as an instrument for man’s
socio-economic development. The indices measure of education as a veritable tool for
development is predicated on its relevance to the needs, problems and aspirations of
human society. According to Agbe (2003), the essence of education is to make the
individual live a worthy life. A worthy life is one that is earning his living through
legitimate economic means by his own contribution to society. Everybody is therefore,
expected to acquire education for a living irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities
(FME, 2004). However, the system of education for the persons with disabilities lacks
the parameter of producing an individual who can live a worthy life in view of their
disabilities. The system emphasizes more on academic subjects which are mostly just
for preparing them for self-supporting life without a job placement.

Galletley (1985) in Okeke (2004), observed that many young persons with
disabilities have left special schools well adjusted but often unemployable. In the same
vein, Giwa (1993) remarked that the curriculum of the rehabilitation centers in Nigeria has failed to help persons with disabilities secure jobs after teaching them skills that are not useful for purpose of employment. Similarly, Rahila and Ibrahim (2010) lamented that liberal education now is not yielding result for persons with disabilities, especially those with low cognitive abilities to adjust successfully in the world of work. As a result of this, most of them depend on philanthropists for living or begging on the streets for alms, as they cannot compete favourably with their able counterparts for meaningful employment. In view of this ugly scene, it has become imperative to refocus the education of this group of persons to a more functional system of education, where they can learn skills in different trades according to their potentials. It will enable them to be self-employed or be perfectly placed in the world of work.

Persons with disabilities in our midst are equally entitled to be active members by contributing their quotas to nation building and not passive dependants on others for their needs. According to Daramola (2011), if persons with disabilities are empowered skillfully and intellectually, it will enhance their standard of living and also improve productivity. He further stressed that the era where they were regarded as handicapped or second class citizens and usually move around the streets begging for alms should be seen to have gone because there is ability in disability. Individuals with disabilities need to be supported, guided and trained to acquire desirable skills, knowledge and good attitude for independent living or self-sustenance. This could be achieved through formal Vocational and Technical Education (VTE).

One of the goals of vocational and technical education is to give training and impart the necessary skills to individuals who shall be self-reliant economically (FME 2004). Furthermore, Agbulu and Olaitan (2002) affirmed that persons with disabilities are academically and psycho-productively rehabilitated from being liabilities to enduring assets through vocational education. The focus of this paper therefore, is to discuss how vocational and technical education can be provided for people with disabilities according to their potentials or abilities towards overcoming their disabilities to live an independent and self-actualized life.

For convenience, the paper is treated under the following sub-headings; The concept of disability and persons with disabilities (PWDs), concept of vocational and technical education, vocational and technical education package for persons with disabilities, Effective method of learning for persons with disabilities in VTE (inclusive).

Concept of Disability and Persons with disabilities:

Literally, the term disability means lack of ability. It also means functional limitation or activity restriction (Ozoji, 2005). According to Onuzurike (2001), disability is the "loss or impairment of a bodily organ or function; activity restriction, functional limitation of an individual's ability to carry out the normal activities of daily living.

Therefore, persons with disabilities are individuals with some forms of impairments. These impairments can either be physical or sensor-neural. Those disabilities give them some forms of challenges that may make it impossible for them to cope effectively with their everyday existence in the society. These categories of people according to the Federal Republic of Nigeria, (2004: 14) are;
a. The deaf and hard of hearing
b. The blind and partially sighted
c. The physically and health impaired. These include the people with deformed limbs and those who are asthmatic.
d. The mentally retarded who may be educable, trainable and or bed ridden
e. The emotionally disturbed who may be hyperactive, the socially maladjusted and behavioral disordered.
f. The speech impaired who may be stammerers or stutterers.
g. The learning disabled and
h. The multiple disabilities

In view of the above disabilities, it is obvious that liberal education such as English, History, Philosophy, among others lack the learning experience to equip persons with disabilities with the necessary potentials to be gainfully employed or self-reliant. Thus they need a functional education that can provide them with saleable skills to compete in the world of work. In same vein, Agbato (2002) stressed that training is fundamental to the life of people with special needs and it should be a functional one. VTE as a functional education can make them self-fulfilled in life as their able bodied counterparts.

Concept of Vocational and Technical Education (VTE):

The Federal Republic of Nigeria, (2004) defined vocational and technical education as a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of the educational process involving in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life. It explained further that VTE is an aspect of life long learning and preparation for responsible citizenship, and also a method of alleviating poverty. The above definitions clearly point out that VTE has all the parameters of empowering persons with disabilities economically and taking them out of begging to be responsible citizens.

Similarly, Olusegun (1992) described vocational and technical education as that aspect of education that is aimed at the development of human abilities in terms of knowledge, skills and understanding so that the individual may be useful to himself and to society. Vocational and technical education is necessary for people with disabilities in order to make them self-reliant and employers of labour which will make them contribute their own quota to national development. Nanchen and Ozoji (2010) observed that science and vocational training has become one of the surest ways of securing economic empowerment for persons with disabilities in the society.

Vocational and Technical Education Package for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs):

Vocational and technical education has a range of trades which people with disabilities can choose a career from depending on their level or type of disabilities. These include:

1. Fine and applied arts
2. Metal work – welding and blacksmithing
3. Electronic works – radio and television services
4. Wood work
5. Computer craft practice: computer maintenance and data processing
6. Beauty culture trade: cosmetology
8. Leather work
9. Music education
10. Agric Education [ FME, 2004:26]

**Fine and Applied Arts:**
According to Olapade (1992) in Yusuf (2010), art is regarded as integral part of the whole endeavour; it is a unique aspect of vocational education which studies the nature in its entirety. Fine and applied Arts include visual arts i.e. ceramics, painting, graphics, sculpture and textile design. In these areas, people with disabilities could learn skills in tie-dye, batik, tailoring, weaving, etc. which will enable them earn a living.

Meanwhile the categories of people with disabilities who have the abilities to choose their career opportunities in fine and applied arts are; persons with hearing impairment, persons with physical and health impairment, persons with speech defect etc. Visually impaired may not fit to be choose a career in fine and applied arts. However, with assistive technology and low vision aids, persons with visual impairment can chose a career in fine and applied arts.

**Metal Work:**
The metal work trade started in Nigeria in the form of blacksmithing, which is still in practice in some parts of the country especially in agrarian areas. Dada (2004), affirmed that Nigeria is well known for her blacksmithing right from ancient days when the art of making hoes and other farm implements were prominently done through blacksmithing. Modern metal work which involves machine and general welding is now considered as one of the most lucrative trades in the country. Persons with disabilities that can choose their career in the above aspects of metal work are: persons with hearing impairment, persons with physical and health impairment, persons with speech defect, and those with learning disabilities.

**Electronic Works:**
The demand for electronic technicians is on the increase as more and modern electronic technologies keep on flowing into the markets e.g. radio, television, cellular phones among others. This is a trade that most persons with disabilities can do as the weights of electronic items are lighter. Those individuals with disabilities that can learn skills in electronic repairs are: persons with physical and health impairment, persons with speech defect and persons with learning disabilities. Those with hearing difficulties may not be fit to choose a career in sound system electronics but they could be better placed in non sound system electronic like wrist watch and others.
Wood Work:
This is another lucrative trade that persons with disabilities can choose as a means of earning an income. Items produced from wood are used both at homes and in public offices and the demand is very high e.g. doors, bed, tables, chairs, caskets, among others. Daramola (2011) noted that the standard of living of the PWDs can be improved upon when those wood work products are sold. The PWDs that can take career opportunities in this trade are: persons with speech defect, the hearing impaired, persons with physical and health impairment that are not too severe. Persons with visual impairment may not be fit to choose a career in wood work. However with assistive technology, some persons with visual impairment can choose a career in woodwork.

Computer Craft Practice:
This is an area that is very promising as almost everything is done on the computer. Yusuf (2010) stressed that computer is a versatile machine whose application is in almost all aspects of human activities worldwide. The areas of interest where the people with disabilities could choose a career in computer craft practice are, web designer, photography, freelance writer, computer word processing, desktop publishing (as secretary or operator) software development, networking, internet establishment. In this area almost every person with disabilities can find a career opportunity.

Beauty Culture Trade: Cosmetology:
The cosmetics industry is an area that will never go into extinction as the habit of looking good is every body’s desire especially the women folk. If persons with disabilities are empowered with the necessary skills in cosmetology e.g. soap making, creams and other facial cosmetics, they will never be beggars again. The category of PWDs that can choose a career in cosmetology include the persons with hearing impairment, persons with physical and health impairment, persons with speech defect. However, those with visual impairment may not be fit in to the trade unless with assistive technology.

Business Education:
The business world is always accommodating new members with quality skills. Adebayo (2006) defined business education as the embodiment of knowledge and skills needed for entry-level employment and advancement in a broad sense of business career. The people, with disabilities can be gainfully employed in different areas of interest such as economics, marketing, secretarial administration, accounting, typewriting, store keeping, advertising, among others. In this area almost every PWD can find a career opportunity. Like the persons with visual impairment, they can choose typewriting through the use of Braille and computer voice machine.

Leather Work:
This is the practice of making leather into craft objects or works of art (Wikipedia, 2009). The use of leather for making items like shoes, belts and different sizes of bags has been a promising trade in the country as everyone needs a leather product. Also the
repairing of those items is another skill that can improve the standard of living of people with disabilities. This does not need much capital for a start. The PWDs that can choose a career in leather work are: persons with hearing impairment, persons with physical and health impairment, persons with speech defect, while some visually impaired may not fit for the trade.

Music Education:

Music According to Yusuf (2010) is the art of combining sound in a manner that is pleasing to the ear. Olapade (1998) describes music as one of the verbal arts that enrich the individual in understanding nature around him. The areas through which people with disabilities could choose a career in music are singing, playing of instruments, repair and maintenance of instruments, studio engineering and music composition. Almost all the PWDs can choose a career in music. An example of persons with visual impairment in music is Steve Wonder, who is a known musician throughout the world (Mohammed, 1995).

Agric Practice:

Agriculture is the art of growing plants and raising of animals for food and other human needs, or economic gain (Bareja, 2011). Food security is the first thing an individual or a nation must think about as man cannot exist without food. This underscores the importance of agriculture to human existence especially the people with disabilities. PWDs can learn skills in agriculture for commercial and subsistence farming for self sustenance. However, Fapohunda (2002) in Yusuf (2010) observed that people with disabilities have done little in farming. The outcome of an experiment conducted revealed that they could be gainfully employed when given the right skills and the right tools to work with. The areas they can venture into farming are: poultry production, Bee keeping, fisheries, rabbitry, piggery, and horticulture where land scraping and varieties of arable crops can be raised. He further pointed out that with the above agric areas, the PWDs can start a career which will enable them to be self – reliant and employer of labour.

The categories of people with disabilities that have the ability to choose a career in Agric education are: persons with hearing impairment, persons with physical and health impairment and persons with speech defect. Visually impaired may not be fit to choose a career in agric education. But with assistive technology, some persons with visual impairment can carry out some tasks in farming.

Effective Method of learning for Persons with Disabilities in VTE (Inclusive)

One obvious reason why children are sent to school is for them to achieve excellence in life. This always formed the priority of school authorities in making sure that they impart the necessary knowledge to the children, and encourage them to achieve academic excellence. It was in this light that the idea of inclusive education came to the fore, to enhance the learning ability of children with special needs to attain their full academic height.
Special needs children like any other children deserve qualitative education in a least restrictive environment (LRE). As human beings, they deserve to be served in a conducive, challenging and non-exclusionary environment, inspite of their disabilities (Onu, 2004).

Inclusive education according to Ogwu, (2000) is that kind of education programming where children with special needs are educated alongside their able bodied counterpart but making provision for their special learning needs. Most a times, the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities is carried out in segregated school settings. To the contrary, Ozoji (2003) stressed that inclusive philosophy has become the norm by which services for special needs children can be rated for contemporaries. This view conformed to the nature of learning in vocational and technical education (VTE) which demands collaboration and sharing of ideas. Most technology gadgets are combination of technologies e.g. computer is a combination of technologies from different scientists or countries that formed such a versatile machine. Thus, learning in VTE for PWDs could be made effective if they are integrated with their able bodied counterparts. It will enable them learn better by way of sharing ideas with the able persons. From the rationale for and benefits of inclusion Mark and Adam (2011) observed that some regular education students can be role models who can facilitate communication, social and adaptive behaviors that will lead to greater academic success of persons with disabilities and vice versa. Another advantage of inclusion for special needs students is the opportunity to make friends and share new experiences. The friendship could help them have a joint business with the able bodied after training which will enhance their income. Therefore, inclusive learning is more appropriate in achieving the objective of training people with disabilities in vocational and technical education.

**Recommendations:**

In order to make persons with disabilities to have a sense of belonging, there is urgent need to empower them in vocational and technical education so that they can acquire skills for self-reliance. The following recommendations are therefore made: -

1. The federal government should pay attention to the implementation of its policy, which says 2% of positions in work places should be made available for the employment of people with special needs.
2. Since the objectives of vocational and technical education is to make people to be self-reliant after acquiring basic skills in areas of study, funds should be provided by either federal, state, or local government for graduates of the VTE programme in order to establish their own trades without any interest on such loans.
3. There should be adequate assistive devices, tools, equipment and instructional facilities in technical colleges and tertiary institutions to enhance the quality of skills needed by students with and without disabilities.
4. Regular school teachers should be retrained for the inclusion to acquire a variety of teaching strategies and know how to use them effectively.
5. Teacher welfare package must be more realistic and vigorously implemented in line with teacher professional demands to boost their morale.
6. The government should enact laws that would protect and empower people with disabilities from the society with tougher sanction against whoever violates them.

Conclusion:
The need to empower people with disabilities in vocational and technical education cannot be overstressed. This will enhance their abilities in becoming responsible people as there is ability in disability. Vocational and technical education has the parameters for providing people with disabilities with saveable skills in different trades for better employment opportunities and for self-sustenance.

References:


