

JOB/CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION FOR YOUTH WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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Abstract

It is a well-known fact that the number of youth with special needs is increasing rapidly and employment opportunities seem to be decreasing. However, this paper focused attention on some trades within vocational and technical education that could provide job opportunities to youth with special needs. The paper dealt with the research objectives, statement of the problem as well as the goals of technical and vocational education. It also, gave some highlights on the relevance of technical and vocational education to youth with special needs. The paper concludes with the recommendations of some trades considered worthwhile.

Introduction

Special education is a formal special training given to people (children and adults) with special needs. It attempts to intervene in educating special needs or exceptional youths by using appropriate facilities, specialized methods and materials, as well as, specially trained teachers. However, special needs youths are those who deviate from the norm (either below or above) and thus require special attention.

Special needs youth are classified into three categories: the disabled, the disadvantaged, and the gifted and talented. The National Policy on Education (2004: 29) is aiming at equalizing educational opportunities for all, irrespective of the child's physical or mental status as well as designing a diversified and appropriate curriculum.

The National Policy on Education (2004:30) considers Technical and vocational education as part of the general education, lifelong learning, instrument for sustainable development as well as a means of alleviating poverty.

The Goals of Technical and Vocational Education

- a) Provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business, particularly at craft, advanced craft and technical levels.
- b) Provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development.
- c) Give training and impart the necessary skills to individuals who shall be self-reliant economically (NPE, 2004; p3).

From the above, one can understand that both technical and vocational education are terms often used interchangeably. For the purpose of distinction, technical education is a post-secondary vocational training programme whose major purpose is the

production of technicians. Technical education, can be distinguished from other vocational education programmes because more mathematics and science are required in the training programme. Graduates of technical education programmes usually bridge the gap between engineer and craftsman.

Objective of the Study

To find out suitable trades in vocational and technical education for youths with special needs for self-reliance.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study is tag on the fact that the number of youths with special needs is increasing rapidly while employment opportunities are decreasing drastically, leading youths with special needs to resort to begging. In the same vein, youths with special needs in secondary schools are not mobilized to partake in trade courses that they should undergo to become self-reliant.

The Relevance of Technical and Vocational Education to Special Needs Youths

Special needs youths should be trained in some trade occupations for their economic and social wellbeing and that of the society. This might lead to abundance of goods and services as against the present situation. Osuala (1998) emphasized on this as thus:

With increased population and an abundance of natural resources, the country is still incapable of meeting its manpower needs due to lack of vocational training. In order to meet the available and future needs of the society, the available manpower must be given vocational training in terms of development in technology and mechanization (p86)

Considering recent developments, Mba (1991) believed that presently, “the education of special needs persons, particularly the adolescents and the adults (youths) is shifting more and more towards the acquisition of vocational skills”. Oladipo (1993) observed that handicapped children and adults learn best when they can actively explore an environment rich in responsibility to make meaningful choices about what is to be learned. He further explained that persons with special needs in technical colleges are not adequately exploring their environment because of the infrastructural facilities/equipment and personnel that were not originally meant to accommodate them.

On the other hand, special needs youths vocational and rehabilitations are accorded the lowest priority of consideration in nearly all developing countries of the world (Mba, 1991). Hence, the above statements show the needs for persons with special needs to provision of opportunities and materials for effective technical and vocational training for self-reliance. Perhaps this might even solve or reduce the problem of juvenile and adult delinquency. Okorie (2001) indicated that:

Our social, educational and economic system stimulated ambitions in the youths to desire more and better goods and services in order to keep up the social pattern. But unfortunately, our educational system has omitted the necessary aspect of teaching the young people how to earn...Evidently, one important cause of delinquency and crime among youths today is the fact that they have not learnt to work so as to make money legitimately and sufficiently to meet their real or fancied wants (p 156).

Vocational training can be provided to youths with special needs depending on the nature and degree of their disabilities. Take for example, hearing impaired persons can take to vocations in such areas as: dress making, poultry keeping, snailry, farming, creative arts, typing and others.

Rabi'u (2004) outlined the following strategic areas that should be addressed:

Establishment of appropriate training facilities and conducive learning environment for children (and youths) with special needs. Integration of children (and youth) with special needs with able-bodied members of the society. Government Affirmative Action plans on the intervention strategies for special persons. Role of society and NGO's in the intervention strategies for special persons. Attitudes of people with special needs of intervention strategies must succeed.

Mba (1991) also outlined the following programmes for special needs persons "carpentry, shoe making, farming, poultry, animal husbandry, tailoring, soap-making, book binding, laundry, water piping, typing, weaving and craftsman". However, under craftsman provision or training in activities, like sculpture, mat making, carving, modeling of different kinds of mats can be made.

Shoe-making or mending can be done by hearing impaired. Physically impaired with normal upper limbs can gainfully be tamed in this programme. They can operate electric and manual sewing machines. They can also work or make and repair leather shoes and sandals, as well as, bags and others. Emmanuel (2006) asserted that tailoring and fashion designing can be well done by persons with disabilities, particularly the sighted ones. Both electrical and manual sewing machines, draping and button-hole machines can be operated. Persons with hearing impairments can gainfully be trained in dry cleaning of cloth and rugs, and upholstery.

Types of Trade Available for Special Needs Youth

Special needs youths can be trained in the following areas: Metal work, Building, Arts and Industrial Design, Electrical Work, Mechanical Work, Computer and in Hotel and Catering Management. However, the following categories of special needs are fully considered for their unique special conditions:

In the Department or section of Metal Work the gifted and talented, the learning disabled, the physically disabled, the behavior disordered, the emotionally disturbed, the speech impaired and the hearing impaired can be trained in welding, fittings, sheet metal, forging, fabrication as well as in casting /foundry work . The same categories of special needs can be trained in wood work like in carpentry, joinery and furniture craft.

In the Department or Section of Building the gifted and talented, the learning disabled, the slow learner, the behavior disordered, the emotionally disturbed and hearing impaired can be trained in plastering block layering , excavation, foundation, flooring, site clearing and construction of stairs. However, the physically disabled can only be trained in block layering depending on the nature of his disability

In Arts and Design all the above categories can be trained in ceramics, sewing, Graphics, Painting, Photography and textile. Nevertheless, the physically disabled may not be trained in ceramics and sewing depending on his disability.

In Mechanical Work, the gifted and talented, the learning disabled, the slow learner, physically disabled, the behavior disordered the emotionally disturbed, the speech and hearing impaired can be trained in metal fabrication and welding, auto-electricity (wiring) , Road regulation and driving, applied science, radio and television repair. Perhaps, the hearing impaired may not be trained in radio and television repairs.

The same categories of special needs can be trained in Electrical Work in trades like electrical device and circuit, radio and electrical circuit, television repair, maintenance and repair, in the same vein these categories may be trained in the Catering and Hotel management in areas like, plaster (traditional and western) Snacks, cakes, all types of traditional crockery, Beverages like, knitting (weaving). However the visually impaired can be trained in knitting (weaving).

In Computer Work, the gifted and talented, the learning disabled, the slow learner, the physically challenged, the behavior disordered, the emotionally disturbed , the speech impaired, the hearing impaired and the visually impaired can be trained in spread or excel sheet, Microsoft Dos, Graphics packages and CorelDraw . However, the visually impaired have some limitations. The same categories of special needs with the exception of the visually impaired can be trained in Printing Department in courses such as Binding, Plate making, machine operation, Cutting, Computer composition and Graphics

The above statements explains those courses that special needs youths can be trained on for self-reliance, however, the gifted and talented youths can be trained in the most highly complicated areas within the trades. It can be observed that the visually impaired youth have less opportunities in the trades.

It should be noted that in woodwork carpentry is more of making floors, roofs and partitions all of which do not require finishing, but joinery is a woodwork project made as part of building that require finishing operation while furniture craft is a wood article for household which requires finishing operation like bedroom, cabinet, and office cabinet upholstery chairs. To put it clear, it includes bedroom cabinet, sit-room cabinet,

kitchen cabinet, office cabinet, mouldings, etc. in ceramics, there is industrial ceramics and studio ceramics for making different containers with different shapes.

Conclusion

Youth with special needs can effectively play their roles towards self-dependence, self-reliance and economic development. This can be realized if government agencies, public enterprises and non-governmental organizations could put heads together and discourage marginalizing the special needs youths and motivate them by offering employment opportunities to qualified special needs youths. Through these, their potentialities can be extensively tapped.

Recommendations

1. Technical and vocational education should be made functional for special needs youths.
2. Technical schools, schools of technology and universities of technology should give special considerations to youths with special needs by opening certificate courses in trades.
3. Government and non-governmental organizations should help in the training and employment of special needs youths for self-reliance.

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