

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING FOR GENDER EQUALITY: AN OVERVIEW

Shuaibu, Saidu
&
Ahmodu, Jacob Shaibu

Abstract

This paper looks at the Inclusive Education, ranging from functional literacy, primary and secondary education to vocational education and skills training of children with disability and without disability as the main purpose of providing basic education and benefits of inclusive education. The paper addresses the concept of gender equality, lifelong learning. Recommendations were made to ensure that gender concerns are identified and addressed at the highest level of politics and public policy, integrate gender awareness components into pre- and in-service teacher training and incorporate gender considerations into activities to develop curricula and learning materials, develop practical tools to support programming staff in designing, implementing, reporting on, and evaluating programs that address equitable access and quality from a gender perspective and inclusive education.

Introduction

Education is universally acknowledged to benefit individuals and promote national development.

Educating females and males produces similar increases in their subsequent earnings and expands future opportunities and choices for both boys and girls. However, educating girls produces many additional socio-economic gains that benefit entire societies. These benefits include increased economic productivity, higher family incomes, delayed marriages, reduced fertility rates, and improved health and survival rates for infants and children.

Over the years, education has focused on access and parity—that is, closing the enrollment gap between girls and boys—while insufficient attention has been paid to retention and achievement or the quality and relevance of education. Providing a quality, relevant education leads to improved enrollment and retention, but also helps to ensure that boys and girls are able to fully realize the benefits of education. The primary focus on girls' access to education may overlook boys' educational needs. This approach also fails to confront the norms and behaviors that perpetuate inequality.

Inclusive education means that all students attend and are welcomed by their neighborhood schools in age-appropriate, regular classes and are supported to learn.

contribute and participate in all aspects of the life of the school. Inclusive education is about how we develop and design our schools, classrooms, programs and activities so that all students learn and participate together (Booth, 2003).

Inclusive Education

“Schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups.” (UNESCO, 1999).

Inclusive education happens when children with and without disabilities participate and learn together in the same classes. Research shows that when a child with disabilities attends classes alongside peers who do not have disabilities, good things happen.

For a long time, children with disabilities were educated in separate classes or in separate schools. People got used to the idea that special education meant separate education. But we now know that when children are educated together, positive academic and social outcomes occur for all the children involved.

We also know that simply placing children with and without disabilities together does not produce positive outcomes. Inclusive education occurs when there is ongoing advocacy, planning, support and commitment.

Inclusive education is a child’s right, not a privilege. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act clearly states that all children with disabilities should be educated with non-disabled children their own age and have access to the general education curriculum.

The Benefits of Inclusive Education

According to Thomas, and Loxley, (2007). All children benefit from inclusive education. It allows them to:

- Develop individual strengths and gifts, with high and appropriate expectations for each child.
- Work on individual goals while participating in the life of the classroom with other students their own age.
- Involve their parents in their education and in the activities of their local schools.
- Foster a school culture of respect and belonging. Inclusive education provides opportunities to learn about and accept individual differences, lessening the impact of harassment and bullying.
- Develop friendships with a wide variety of other children, each with their own individual needs and abilities.
- Positively affect both their school and community to appreciate diversity and inclusion on a broader level.
- Children develop a positive understanding of themselves and others.

- In inclusive classrooms, children with and without disabilities are expected to learn to read, write and do math. With higher expectations and good instruction children with disabilities learn academic skills.

Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning refers to the education that people experience throughout their lives, which may be in the form of formal, non-formal or informal education. It is the kind of education considered essential for improving the quality of life. (Gerhard, 2000).

Education is processes, events, activities and conditions those assist and encourage learning. Education may be planned or random but it helps in learning. Thus education is a service. Lifelong education requires that someone i.e. government or other agencies who develop policies and devote resources to education; these cover a broad array of informal, non-formal and formal settings where deliberate choices are made.

Human beings consciously or unconsciously keep on learning and training themselves throughout their lives. This may be a result of the influence of the surroundings which mould their behavior, their concept of life and the content of their knowledge. Lifelong education is form of education which covers whole of the individual life in one or other way (McIntosh, 2005).

In recent time scholars and planners put the education in a broader view by promoting the concept of lifelong education. Advocates of lifelong education view that education is a process that continues in one form or another throughout life. Its purposes and forms are to be adapted to the needs of individuals at different stages in their development (Rashid, 1993). Education is seen as an integral part of life and all the institutions of society with an educative potential are considered resources for learning. It is that educational process by which individuals become more competent in their knowledge and skills so that they gain more control over their environment.

Lifelong education is a blend of pedagogy. It can be provided through various modes like distance learning, e-learning, continuing education or correspondence courses. The concept of lifelong education has been under the process of continuous change because of increased duration of formal education and insufficiency of skills attained in schooling for future career and success. Lifelong education was initially emerged as a blend of informal, formal and non-formal education with the aim of improvement in quality of life but now the concept covers all times and all places, starting from birth and ending at death.

Lifelong learning may be broadly defined as learning that is pursued throughout life: learning that is flexible, diverse and available at different times and in different places. Lifelong learning crosses sectors, promoting learning beyond traditional schooling and throughout adult life (ie post-compulsory education). This definition is based on Delors' (1996).

Gender Equality

Gender equality, also known as sex equality, sexual equality or equality of the genders, refers to the view that men and women should receive equal treatment, and should not be discriminated against based on gender, unless there is a sound biological reason for different treatment. Glendyne, (2011).

Gender equality is the measurable equal representation of women and men. Gender equality does not imply that women and men are the same, but that they have equal value and should be accorded equal treatment.

The United Nations regards gender equality as a human right. It points out that empowering women is also an indispensable tool for advancing development and reducing poverty.

Promoting gender equality in all areas of education is the means by which we can ensure not only that the basic needs of girls and boys are met, but that they have the opportunity to achieve their full potential and realize their human rights.

Ensuring gender equality in education means girls and boys have equal opportunities to enter school, as well as to participate in and benefit from the range of subjects or other learning experiences offered in schools and classrooms. Through gender-sensitive curricula, learning materials and teaching-learning processes, girls and boys become equally equipped with the life skills and attitudes they will need to achieve their full potential within and outside of the education system, regardless of their sex.

To achieve gender equality in learning we need to move away from seeing children collectively as “students” or “pupils” and to focus more on the specific situation of “girls” and “boys” within the classroom and the school.

Equality of educational outcomes means that girls and boys enjoy equal opportunities to achieve and outcomes are based on their individual talents and efforts. To ensure fair chances for achievement, the length of school careers, academic qualifications, and diplomas should not differ based on a person’s sex. Mechanisms for evaluating individual achievement should also be free of any gender bias. What tests, examinations, and assessments measure tells students what matters and to the extent that these mechanisms reflect a gender bias, they transmit messages to students that can discourage their interest in school or in particular subjects. Results from classroom tests, national examinations, and international assessments can influence boys’ and girls’ confidence levels and their perceptions of their abilities and what is expected of them.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Quality, retention, and achievement are essential elements of an education strategy designed to ensure that boys and girls maximize their full potential. As the Gender Equality in Education Framework indicates, addressing issues of access is insufficient to ensure that boys and girls receive the maximum benefit from their

education. Getting children into school is crucial; ensuring that they stay in school, learn, and achieve requires more. Schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This paper recommended that develop practical tools to support programming staff in designing, implementing, reporting on, and evaluating programs that address equitable access and quality from a gender perspective and inclusive education.

References

- Booth, T. (2003) *The Index for Inclusion: Developing Learning & Participation in Schools*. Bristol: Center for Studies in Inclusive Education
- Delors, J. (1996) *Learning: The treasure within Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century*, UNESCO
- Gerhard, F. (2000). "Lifelong Learning - More than Training" in *Journal of Interactive Learning Research*, 11(3/4) pp 265-294.
- Glendyne R. (2011). *Sisters in the Faith: Shaker Women and Equality of the Sexes*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- McIntosh, C. (2005). Introduction. In McIntosh, C. (Ed.) *Final Lifelong Learning and Distance Education*. COL/UNESCO
- Rashid, M. (1993). *Study Guide Advanced Course on Non-Formal Education (734)*. Islamabad: Allama Iqbal Open University.
- Thomas, G., & Loxley, A. (2007) *Deconstructing Special Education and Constructing Inclusion (2nd Edition)*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (1999). *Inclusive, Gender and education for all: The leap to equality*. Paris: UNESCO.