

Should They Be Excluded? Adult Education and Adult Persons with Disability in Swaziland

Theme: Formal Education

Sub theme: Open Schooling

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ABSTRACT

One of the guiding principles governing Special Education in Swaziland is that education programmes shall be designed and offered to children with special needs such as physical disabilities, visual and auditory impairment, mental disabilities, social and behavioural problems as well as gifted children. Conversely, very limited special needs education is provided in Swaziland to both the young and old people with disability. There are only three Special Education schools namely; Ekwetsembeni which takes care of the mentally - handicapped, Siteki School of the deaf and St Joseph's, which caters for other physical and learning disabilities. Worst still, this principle completely excludes adult persons with the same disabilities which are clearly spelt out by the same guiding principle, thus depriving them of the opportunity to acquire education. Without education, disabled adult persons in Swaziland continue to be marginalized, discriminated against and excluded from mainstream activities. Using life histories of disabled adult people, this paper raises awareness on the plight of the disabled adults in Swaziland. It demonstrates that most disabled adult Swazis live under very deplorable conditions. The paper further examines the purpose and objectives of adult education in the development of the Swazi nation. It also suggests ways through which the livelihood of adult disabled persons could be improved. Amongst the suggestions made, Adult education is given as the last hope for adult persons with disability.

INTRODUCTION

This study was brought about by the theory of Human Capital Approach to Education. This approach argues that education and training constitute an investment in human capital (Harbison and Myers, 1964: 56). Such an investment yields future returns in the form of income and earnings for the individual, and increased economic growth through enhanced productivity for the society. Proponents of this theory argue that individuals, rational beings, always seek to maximize their utility and productive capacity through the acquisition of skills and knowledge necessary for economic growth. Unfortunately disabled adults in Swaziland have been denied that opportunity of continuously acquiring skills and knowledge necessary for economic growth. A clear evidence of this is the number of educated disabled person versus the number of uneducated disabled persons. According to the 1997 census (The Kingdom of Swaziland, 1997: 8), persons with disability in Swaziland numbered 27,698. Out of this number 12,397 disabled persons, aged 10 years and older, had no formal education. This means that about half the

population of disabled persons in Swaziland were completely illiterate. About 33 percent (8,336) of the other half of the population of disabled persons, had some primary education, fifteen percent had post primary education; this number includes the 768 disabled persons with vocational certificates and diplomas. Only 0.4 percent (95) disabled persons had university education. The numbers of both the illiterate persons and economically inactive persons among the disabled in Swaziland are very huge. This is a very bad situation for a developing country like Swaziland whose development is highly dependent on the availability of human resource and the level of education of its human resource. Such a situation makes adult education imperative. At this point one would be interested to know what adult education is.

ADULT EDUCATION AND ITS PURPOSE

Different people define the concept of adult education differently. As a result, a contextual definition of the word is desirable to enable one to fully comprehend the main argument of this paper. UNESCO (1977: 26) defines adult education as “the entire body of organized educational processes, whatever the content, level, and method, whether formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, colleges and university as well as in apprenticeship, whereby persons regarded as adult by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualification and bring about changes in their attitude or behaviour in two folds perspective of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economical and cultural development. This is a very comprehensive definition which takes care of both cases of adults who had never been to school and those who have attended school to a certain extent. It further spells out clearly the purpose of adult education. According to this definition, adult education is meant to develop the abilities of an adult learner, enrich their knowledge and improve their technical or professional qualification thus bringing about changes in behaviour and attitude. This definition presupposes that adult learners have: abilities which only need to be developed, knowledge which only needs to be enriched, and technical or professional skills which need to be improved.

Unfortunately, that is not always the case with all adult learners. Depending on one’s level of prior education, some adult learners may have no technical qualification to improve, no knowledge to enrich. I fully concur with Roger’s perception of adult education as having a technical function in that it provides a trained labour force by promoting the skills and knowledge or giving individuals capabilities. It establishes status by enabling one to achieve a role (1992: 33). Emphasizing this technical function of adult education, Selman and Dampier state that adult education has a vocational function in that it gives knowledge and skills required to perform a job (1991:12). Selman and Dampier all attest to the fact that adult education enables the learner to earn a living. They imply that without adult education, any adult person who did not have the chance to get education during their school going age is unable to earn a living. Dwyer rightly puts this when he says “for the individual, the essential functions of adult education are to increase the ‘life chance’ and the ‘life space’ of the person. By life chance is meant that adult education gives individuals basic education, vocational training and personal development which allow the person to get ahead with the kind of life he/she wants to live. Life space refers to broadening the horizons of the person’s life...” (1991: 16).

DISABILITY AND ADULT EDUCATION IN SWAZILAND

Although the 1999 National Policy statement on education endorsed the idea that disabled children in Swaziland should be educated and through this policy statement, the Swazi government further committed herself to designing education programmes which would be offered to children with special needs such as physical disabilities, visual and auditory impairment, mental disabilities, social and behavioral problems, this is currently still an exception rather than a norm. Only (one in five) disabled children get education. The ministry of education further committed itself to facilitating access to

education for all learners with disability by improving the infrastructure to make it user-friendly from basic through tertiary level. But to date, there has been no improvement in infrastructure for the above-cited reason.

The failure of government to fulfill the promise it pronounced in the policy statement issued more than ten years ago has meant, amongst other things, that a huge number of disabled children had gone beyond the school going age without having a chance of seeing the four walls of a classroom. Even among those that went to school, a majority could not attain tertiary education. This situation makes adult education the only messiah for these hopeless and vulnerable adults. They need to be provided the opportunity for vocational training and or professional development.

Unfortunately, the purpose of adult education in Swaziland is unclear and grossly inadequate. In Swaziland, the national policy on education identified the purpose in one phrase by stating that "Adult Education shall provide numeracy, literacy and life skills (The Kingdom of Swaziland, 1999: 7). Such a purpose is grossly inadequate because the acquisition of the above mentioned skills does not always equip one with the kind of knowledge that will enable him/her to improve his/her own life and further contribute towards the development of ones own society. It cannot always lead to financial autonomy and cannot always make one responsible for his own life and that of other people close to him. The purpose of adult education should be more than just a provision of numeracy, literacy and life skills.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is a combination of theoretical and empirical research. The researcher, encouraged by the theory of Human Capital Approach to Education, read relevant literature on disability and education. The literature read partly confirmed this theory. The researcher was curious to find out if this theory held water in the case of Swaziland. She then conducted oral interviews, where disabled adults were telling their life experiences. This method is called life history. Snow-balling was used as the selection criteria simply because the researcher would not be in a position to know the intended informants in person.

THE LIFE HISTORIES OF SELECTED INDIVIDUALS

Alzinah Hlatshwako

Alzinah Hlatshwako was born deaf in 1965 July. She started schooling at the age of 8 years at Siteki School of the Deaf. In this school she went up to Grade 7 but could not complete this grade because she lost both her parents and without them, she could not pay the examination fee. "I went to stay with my sister in 1981. Life was very bad because my sister was a single parent with many children and was working as a domestic servant. I met my life partner in 1990 and we got married." Her husband was a teacher but he fell sick a few years after they had been married. He was diagnosed as having cancer. They already had two children. He had to stop teaching and she had to take care of her husband. Her sister helped her to acquire a job as a domestic servant. "I received clothes for my two children from my generous employer. They also gave me food. I had to use the money I got to pay school fees and to take care of my terminally ill husband". Her husband died in 1999. She is now staying only with her two girls.

Dlamini Nompilo

Dlamini Nompilo is deaf. She was born at Ngculwini in the Manzini region on October 15 1967. She is forty two years old. She started her primary school in 1976 in the School of the Deaf, in Siteki in the Lubombo region. This is the only primary school for the deaf in the country and for a very long time it has been the only school for the deaf until recently when a secondary school was started at Mpaka. Nompilo was staying in a boarding house under the guardianship of the Roman Catholic Sisters. Talking about this

she said: "I started staying with the Catholic Sisters in 1975 at eNjabulweni Mission House. They had taken me from home so that I could start school." But In 1975 the school for the deaf was still under construction. It was in 1976 that the school started operating. When the school started, it was very difficult for both the learners to learn and the teachers to teach because the teachers did not know sign language. Instead they forced learners to lip-read while they were teaching and the learners found it difficult to do that. They preferred sign language, but their teachers would sometimes induce corporal punishment to force them to turn to lip reading. When asked to explain how teaching and learning took place with the teachers who did not know sign language, Nompilo stated that their teachers would write on the board and they were required to take notes. "Our teachers believed that a deaf pupil could not communicate anything in class. If we had questions, we wrote them on the board and the teacher would respond by writing the answer on the board. Our learning process was very difficult because our teachers did not have any knowledge of sign language." She completed Grade 7 in 1985. In the following year she went to Sidwashini Vocational Centre to learn how to make table mats and how to do carpentry. She could not continue with school because there was no secondary school for the deaf.

She is currently a volunteer with the Federation of the Disabled in Swaziland (FODSWA) where she helps with the teaching of sign language to Civil Servants and she gets money enough for her to buy toiletry.

Khanyakwezwe Thwala

Khanyakwezwe Thwala is a physically disabled person. He was born on 19/12/1978 at Nyakeni in the Manzini region. He went to St Josephs School to start his primary education in 1990. He completed form five in 2001. He wanted to be a lawyer but could not because he did not get very good symbols (results) that could qualify him for university education. In 2004 he got a bursary from 'Tibiyo TakaNgwane' to do a two year Diploma Course in IT. "In 2006 up to 2007 May, I remained at home. It was in June 2007 that I started working for the Sports Council under the Disability Sports Department. I worked as an administrator on a voluntary basis and was only able to get money to buy toiletry. In February 2010, I applied for a research activity carried out by the Federation of the Disabled in Swaziland, and was hired as data capturer." To date he is still engaged in that research undertaking with FODSWA. He lamented that he did not know how he would earn a living when this research exercise comes to an end because he did not have a permanent employment anywhere.

Mamba Philile Ncamsile

Mamba Philile Ncamsile is blind. She was born in January 1984, at the Good Shepherd Hospital in Siteki. She went to St Joseph's primary school and could only go up to grade 6. She had to drop out of school simply because her father who paid for her fees died. From 1997 to 2007 she remained at home with no hope for the future. This situation was compounded by the death of her mother in 2001. The death of both her parents was a very hard blow to her life because it meant she had to rely entirely on the provision of relatives even for basic needs like food, toiletry, clothes and others. Life only improved in 2008 after her elder brother was admitted at the University of Swaziland. "My brother used his food and personal allowances to buy us food and toiletry. He also spared some of his allowances to send me to Ekululameni in 2010. I have learnt a lot of skills from this place for instance knitting jerseys and scarves, poultry production, fencing etc" She looks forward to finishing her skills training at Ekululameni rehabilitation centre but is fearful that she might not have money to start her own business and become the business person she always dreamt to be.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The absence of investment in human resource is the main constraint to social and economic development of any nation (Ayeni, 2007: 27). The large number of uneducated and illiterate adults in developing countries is responsible for hindering socio-economic development in developing countries. In solving this problem, embarking on the development of human talent through adult education programmes becomes imperative. The recipient of adult education will be able to liberate themselves from the limitations and constraints of ignorance as well as from the limitations and constraints of ignorance as well as from the common dependence on forces which they should be able to control. Thus adult education is seen as a veritable tool for all forms of development

There is need to look at the definition of disability if we seriously want to stop the marginalization and discrimination of disabled persons in Swaziland. The 1997 population census defines disability as a “ a physical or mental handicap that inhibits an individual's ability to work or participate in normal activities.” (The Kingdom of Swaziland, 1997: 7). It is worth-noting the fact that this definition was formulated using the medical school of thought on disability. According to the medical perspective, disability is what is wrong with disabled people (Albert,2004:2) In light of these definitions, disability includes blindness, deafness, the various conditions making it impossible to walk or speak, mental illnesses and other conditions like Down syndrome and epilepsy (Albert ,2004:2). This definition makes disability a health issue and it equates it with impairment.

By so doing, this theory of disability, as Albert observes encourages society to imagine disabled people as abnormal or as patients and dependent objects in need of a variety of medical and rehabilitative interventions (2004:2). It implies that disabled persons have to be cared for and they have to be protected. Although the medical theory has afforded disabled persons chances of being taken care of as ‘helpless’ members of society, it has deprived them of their independence as human beings. It has also led to their exclusion from and segregation in the socio-economic spheres of life.

From the 1960s, the medical theory began to be challenged especially by the British Disability movement. One of the main British critiques of the conventional approach was Paul Hunt, a disabled British citizen who in his edited collection titled, *Stigma: The Experience of Disability* (1966), argued that, “the problem of disability lies not only in the impairment of function and its effects on us individually, but also, more importantly, in the area of our relationship with ‘normal’ people” (1966:146). His criticism of the medical theory of disability and many other criticisms from the British Disability Movement gave rise in the 1970s to the social theory whose proponents were activists in the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS). Their criticisms gave birth to the social theory of disability.

The social theory of disability is currently the most popular theory used as a yard stick to measure the credibility of disability politics in Britain. According to this theory, “it is society that disables physically impaired people. Disability is something imposed on top of peoples’ impairments by the way disabled persons are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group in society” (Shakespeare and Watson, 2002:3). In light of this definition, it can be argued that according to the social theory of disability, society is worth the blame of disabling ‘able’ persons. It is not the impairments that disable people with disability but it is society itself. Society would need to stop disabling them by changing its attitude towards them.

Albert further notes that, “according to the social model disable people were disadvantaged not because of their impairments, but as a result of the limitations imposed on them by social, cultural, economic, and

environmental barriers. Disability according to this formulation, is not about health or pathology but about discrimination and social exclusion” (2004:4). Since this model perceives disability as a socio-political and not as a health related issue, it therefore means that the improvement of the plight of the disabled could only be achieved if the disabling environment has been destroyed and a new world order created in its place.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion one may emphasize the fact that the acquisition of education is very essential in increasing economic growth and improving one’s personal life. This paper has indicated that in Swaziland a majority of disabled persons does not have a chance to acquire education. The life histories of the four informants demonstrated that disabled people stand a very limited chance to complete form five. Even the few that complete form five find it difficult to gain admission in tertiary institutions. Without higher education, disabled persons are not able to earn a living. It is challenges such as these that make adult education in the form of open schooling the only messiah for adult people with disability in Swaziland.

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