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Inclusive Teaching and Learning Transformation in Technical and Vocational Education and Training: A Case of a Center in Namibia

Ephraim Muesee*¹, Lukas Matati Josua², & Kashinaua Faustina Neshila³¹National Youth Service, National Youth Service, Grootfontein, Namibia²Department of Higher Education and Lifelong Learning, University of Namibia, Oshakati, Namibia³Department of Intermediate and Vocational Education, University of Namibia, Windhoek, Namibia

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Abstract: Background: Technical and vocational education and training stream is deemed to have the potential to fast-track skills acquisition and enhance employability. The skills and knowledge obtained has a potential to drive productivity in knowledge-based context of the twenty-first century. **Purpose:** The paper discusses the benefits and challenges in implementing inclusion in Higher education. It also explores inclusive teaching and learning of differently-abled students in the Technical and Vocational Education and Training in Namibia. The paper makes suggestions on enhancing inclusion of the marginalized candidates in the higher education institutions that offer technical and vocational education training in Namibia. **Objectives:** 1) to enhance inclusive teaching and learning of the marginalized candidates in the technical and vocational education training in Namibia, 2) to create a balanced ability representation in TVET institutions and 3) to propose interventions for equitable inclusive teaching and learning in TVETs. **Methods:** This paper is guided by Schön's (1996) critical reflection to transform inclusive teaching and learning in technical and vocational education and training in Namibia. **Conclusion:** The concluded that more should be done to accomplished inclusion in technical education and training. The TVETs have facilities that accommodates people with disabilities but more need to be considered in order to make reasonable accommodations to help or ensure inclusive practices. **Recommendation:** The paper recommended a further research to come up with a well-rounded wholistic approach and further guidance into the matter.

Keywords: Technical and Vocation Education; Inclusive; Animal Husbandry; Teaching, Learning and Assessment.

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of inclusivity is broad. Given their significant influence on societal and economic decision-making, ability to expand career prospects, and ability to combat social exclusion, higher learning institutions such as Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges are crucial for enhancing people's quality of life (Lipka *et al.*, 2019).

We discovered that most of higher learning institutions in Namibia are yet to incorporate inclusivity. At TVET colleges, we find that the students who come to learn there are those who would have failed to get places in institutions such as National University of Science and Technology (NUST), University of Namibia (UNAM) and International University of Management (IUM) because of lower points than those required by these universities. This means that at some universities one finds academically gifted learners, yet at TVETs one finds learners that are not academically gifted. In essence, if this concept of inclusivity is applied to all the colleges, then a student who has, say, 35 points will be seen studying for a qualification in welding or carpentry at one of the TVETs. We argue that in terms of academic performance, enrolled students should have varying capabilities, and this means that we should not have 'bright students' in one institution and 'less bright' in another. A mixture of capabilities will necessitate the

exchange and assistance of students across these academic lines. TVETs should not be seen as second options for potential learners.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to explore inclusivity in of differently-abled students in the Technical and Vocational Education and Training in Namibia. The paper makes suggestions on enhancing inclusion of the marginalized candidates in the higher education institutions that offer technical and vocational education training in Namibia. This article is guided by the following objectives:

- To enhance inclusive teaching and learning of the marginalized candidates in the technical and vocational education training in Namibia.
- To create a balanced ability representation in TVET institutions.
- To propose interventions for equitable inclusive teaching and learning in TVETs.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is guided by Schön (1996), who postulate that critical reflection is a transformational tool that educators should use on a continuous basis in order to change the teaching, learning and assessment processes in a higher education context. This critical reflective practice enables transformative learning.

Reflection process enables introspection which is “a process of self-examination and self-evaluation” to transform student learning (Shandomo, 2010, p. 103). Taking a critical reflective approach to inclusivity in the technical and vocational education and training stream involves a systematic contextual analysis that opposes common-sense approach. Educators in reflective practice take an introspection to advance self-analysis aimed at enhancing student learning (Stierer, 2008). This brings new insight to a phenomenon while compressing complacency and stagnation. This paper is underpinned by Schön’s (1996) ‘reflection-in-action’ to analyse inclusivity in a TVET setting in Namibia. According to Schön, reflective practice requires the agents in technical and vocational education and training to learn from experience in order to transform the operational practice. Educators, through reflective analysis, develop strategies to address challenges that may hinder effective technical and vocational epistemic access among students. This paper adopted a critical reflection to address inclusivity in a technical and vocational education and training context in Namibia by going beyond simple description to deeply engage the context by providing constructive reflection aimed at transforming the context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Inclusivity and disabilities

In as much as we may discuss about inclusivity in terms of mixing learners of different academic abilities, we also relate to inclusivity in terms of incorporating people with disabilities in institutions of higher learning (HL). The literature demonstrates that there is still much to be accomplished in the case of designated groups, such as people with disabilities, despite the efforts made by universities (creating regulations that guarantee the rights of students, disability support offices, and teacher training in inclusive education). This is demonstrated by the fact that despite efforts to enhance the accessibility of students with disabilities, this group nevertheless has a high dropout rate (Veitch *et al.*, 2018). Although TVETs have facilities that accommodate people with disabilities, these facilities, as per our discovery, are not doing enough to accommodate such people. Disability is broad, and this means that HL institutions should also broaden their enthusiasm to cater for every element of disability among its students or potential students. Despite efforts made by universities, the literature shows that there is still more to be done in the case of designated populations, such as those who are differently-abled (creating regulations that guarantee the rights of students, disability support offices, and teacher training in inclusive education). This is shown by the fact that despite efforts to make disabled students more accessible, this group nevertheless has a high dropout rate (Veitch *et al.*, 2018).

Higher learning institutions such TVETs and small colleges need to be more accessible to students who are not typically represented in society, according to

a number of different segments of the population (Kendall, 2016). Creating an inclusive culture necessitates a number of beliefs and attitudes that recognise students as unique persons with distinct learning needs who come from diverse environments (McKay & Devlin, 2016). Some research, like the one by Collins *et al.* (2018), describe successful situations in the context of HL institutions and identify certain protective variables that support social and academic inclusion. Some of these are supported by their friends, classmates, and family, which helps their academic experiences. Other elements, particularly faculty personnel, have a bearing on academic institutions (O’Brien *et al.*, 2019; Strnadová *et al.*, 2015). Students like their congenial demeanor, educational methods, and willingness to make fair adjustments (Gale *et al.*, 2017).

Inclusive education enables students from diverse backgrounds and abilities to come and meet at one educational institution. The idea is that these students will be able to assist one another (for example, pushing one’s wheelchair) and this instils a sense of belonging and assistance even beyond the university or college life. Everyone should be accommodated in any university or college regardless of impairment. This inclusivity allows the spirit of togetherness as enshrined in the concept of Ubuntu. Ubuntu is an African philosophy that emphasises “becoming self through others.” Ubuntu, as togetherness or cooperation, teaches us that the success of the class is perpetuated by teamwork but not at the expense of the individual. Ubuntu therefore aims to eliminate the spirit of individualism perpetuated through such teachings as, ‘*Ini ndini, Iwe ndiwe*’ (I am, you are), which emphasise the individual separateness from other members of the community (Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru & Makuva, 2014). Ubuntu is well revealed in inclusive teaching, learning and assessment environments.

However, some researches on inclusivity that have been published to date show the prevalence of exclusionary practices and draw the conclusion that differently-abled students must overcome a number of obstacles that prevent their long-term retention at HL institutions (Love *et al.*, 2015; Vlachou & Papananou, 2018). These students have to deal with their disabilities and their academics at the same time. This becomes a bit challenging but when they are diluted in others, they tend to get assistance. A fellow student cannot watch a differently-abled colleague struggling. So due to the fact that they must balance their education with managing their condition, some students believe they must work more than other students (Seale *et al.*, 2015). This is one of the obstacles in students experience (Love *et al.*, 2015). Differently-abled students note that, occasionally, facilitators either have a bad attitude or are unwilling to provide the required reasonable accommodations. This might be because, according to these experts, they lack the expertise and knowledge required to address the educational requirements of learners with disabilities (Martins *et al.*, 2018).

In fact, most colleges follow a deficit model wherein the student is seen as the center of the issue and staff members only act once the student runs into a problem (Wray & Houghton, 2019). Contrarily, an inclusive approach encourages faculty to take proactive action by creating accessible curricula from the start, where each student would have a place.

There are some researchers who concentrate on examining faculty members' viewpoints on assisting these students within an educational framework, despite the growing number of studies gathering the impressions of students who are differently-abled. The idea of inclusive pedagogy is beginning to be employed in the context of higher education (Gale *et al.*, 2017). Previously, Florian (2015) discussed the viewpoint of educators who create inclusive pedagogies in the context of compulsory education. This author claims that inclusive pedagogy is a teaching strategy that addresses individual differences without relying primarily on individualised approaches that involve providing pupils with something extra or different, preventing marginalisation in the classroom.

Gale *et al.* (2017) defined three aspects of inclusive pedagogy: attitudes, design, and behaviors, with an emphasis on the HL institution setting. They contend that before enforcing uniform and default behavior on everyone, college staff members should recognise the distinctions among their students and the behaviors that work best with them. This is because all students are said to contribute value to the learning environment. Faculty members that use inclusive pedagogy are known for being extremely sensitive to diversity and quick to address any impediments that can get in the way of students' involvement and learning. When they understand that their standard tactics do not reach all students, they are professionals who use alternative methodological approaches (Byra, 2006). In Agriculture, it is noted that students with disabilities do not want to come and study there. This norm should be abolished as students with disabilities can also be accommodated in TVET faculties and departments.

This pedagogical strategy, which is hardly ever implemented in HE, and which must be implemented, motivates faculty members to provide opportunities for every student, with or without disabilities, and fosters the learning capacity of those with disabilities (Bunbury, 2018; Veitch *et al.*, 2018). This is especially important given that numerous studies have found that experiences with educational and social inclusion processes can be had by students in HIM. In the case of individuals with disabilities, institutes of HL can be seen as a means of enhancing their quality of life and offering a significant sense of empowerment (Järkestig Berggren *et al.*, 2016).

Inclusivity and other elements of diversity

In TVETs setting, the clarion question has been why older people are not roped in to study for any of the

courses offered by these TVETs. Although there is an opportunity of enrolling through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), it was not satisfactory. Inclusivity means there should be no discrimination based on age, but the discrimination is there. TVETs in most cases teach students on how to be handy, and in most cases, they teach people to be self-employed after they finish their studies. Courses such as welding, carpentry, sewing, bricklaying; most of which after completing studies, one will become self-employed. Older people may have the capacity, practically, to do any of these courses, but are excluded because they may not have prior learning qualification such as grade 10 or 12. A previously non-academic person (in this case, someone without grade 10 or 12 certificate) could be accommodated and learn how to keep animals. Our understanding is that as long as the potential student has little knowledge of that area, he/she should be accommodated. This concept, is however, debatable but teaching a 50- or 60-year-old animal husbandry is fulfillment of inclusive practice in TVET.

We are also of the understanding that the concept of inclusivity touches on gender, race, political affiliation. As seen in the NYS, accommodate all the students regardless of gender. There are also women, yet traditionally, Agriculture was not a feminine field. We would be contented to have a mixture of both men and women in the faculty and see more of women joining Agriculture, the once male dominated profession.

Challenges of inclusivity

There are challenges facing higher education context and TVET centers are no exception to the shortfalls. Another observed shortcoming of online learning and teaching is the exclusion of the less fortunate. For instance, this has a more daunting effect on learners with special needs may be left behind because the enabling devices that they use may be too costly. In a study about inclusion of learners with visual impairments in a mainstream school Emvula (2007) and Josua (2013) agree that it is a challenge to acquire these assistive technologies because they are expensive. The cost and the bureaucratic procurement procedures involved in acquiring these assistive technologies for learners with visual impairments is more expensive than any other types of technology.

During COVID-19 pandemic some teachers and learners were caught by surprise by the sudden migration to online platforms (Akram *et al.*, 2021). The marginalized and the learners who are differently-able had to deal with double tragedies. Lack of ability to maneuver around digital platforms by both learners and academic staff were thrown in the deep end. It was assumed that they know how digital technology work. Many institutions that have not introduced online learning and teaching were caught by surprise in terms of physical and personnel readiness.

A study by Moluayonge (2020) conducted in Cameroon revealed pitfalls related to the use of modern educational technology to enable e-learning in higher education during COVID-19. The study found that the lack of appropriate training for teachers and learners was a challenge to effective learning and teaching. These challenges negatively affected the smooth running of learning and teaching process in a higher education context. In the context of TVET, some suspended lessons because it could not cope with the pace of migration to digital technology.

Benefits of inclusivity

In Higher Education (HE), inclusive curriculum design is crucial, and making reasonable accommodations can help to ensure inclusive practices. Inclusivity has some benefits, and the designing of curriculum should hence accommodate people from all the diverse backgrounds. We have noted that if the curriculum is not designed to accommodate inclusivity, then there will be a challenge to the implementation of inclusivity. Inclusivity promotes a sense of respect and community. Additionally, it offers the chance to become aware of and accepting of individual diversity. Facilitators could opt for inclusivity to enable opportunity while practicing inclusion. This then increases social network and hence, more respect for others.

It is also noted that when inclusivity is adopted, there is shared learning opportunities. Students tend to assist one another in their assessments. They share ideas, information and this concept of sharing and teamwork makes students to have higher academic expectations.

There is also increased safety by reducing isolation. Inclusivity is a concept that opposes isolation. It encourages a sense of belonging to a particular group. Students will feel they are one family, who have a common goal to achieve. As the old adage goes, "sharing is caring", inclusivity ensures that there is a wider access to a wider range of school resources, which increases collaboration and participation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The discussion in this paper brings us to the conclusion that there is more to be accomplished in the case of designated groups. Even though TVETs have facilities that accommodates people with disabilities as per our discoveries these institutions or centers are not doing enough to accommodate such people. Inclusive curriculum review and redesigning is a crucial thing that must be considered in order to make reasonable accommodations to help or ensure inclusive practices.

Recommendations

After considering the lack of inclusion of differently abled students at NYS, it has become very

alarming to see how the implementation and inclusion of students with disability at all the various TVET institutions in the country. The paper then is recommending a thorough research and further study in this area in order to come up with a well rounded wholistic approach and further guidance into the matter. With this work, we aimed to progress critical knowledge fundamental to further develop the research with the ultimate goal to capture the enormous opportunities of improving people's experience in the TVETs environment in Namibia, for all citizens.

Conflict of interest

Authors have no conflict of interest in publishing this paper

Ephraim Muesee is an intern facilitator of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in the department of animal production and agriculture at National Youth Service Centre (NYS). He holds a Bachelor of Theology and is a mentee in the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education at University of Namibia His research interests are centered around animal husbandry and participation of the marginalized group in teaching, learning and assessment in TVET curriculum development, quality assurance and use of technology TVET training.

Lukas MATATI Josua is a Lecturer in the Department of High Education and Lifelong Learning at the University of Namibia. He holds a PhD in Educational Management and Administration from University of Namibia and Postgraduate Diploma in High Education for Academic Developers from Rhodes University, South Africa. Matati's research interests are on issues such decoloniality, high education context, educational management and leadership.

Dr Faustina Kashinaua Neshila is a Head of Department and Lecturer in the Intermediate and Vocational Education at the University of Namibia. She holds a PhD in Mathematics Education from University of Namibia and Postgraduate Diploma in High Education for Academic Developers from Rhodes University, South Africa. Her research interests are on issues such related to vocational education and participation of a boy child in high education spectrum.

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