Extolling The Role of Sociology of Education in Empowering Individuals with Disabilities in Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper examined the extolling the role of sociology of education in empowering individuals with disabilities in Nigeria. The paper discussed the concept of disabilities, education, sociology, and sociology of education. The paper also discussed the Contributions of Sociology of Education to People with Disabilities in Nigeria which included; critical analysis of educational systems, understanding social dynamics, advocacy and policy development, examining intersectionality, empowering marginalized voices, critical analysis of social structures, advocacy for inclusive policies, understanding intersectionality among others. The paper concluded that sociology of education stands as a beacon of empowerment for individuals with disabilities in Nigeria. sociology of education paves the way for the empowerment of individuals with disabilities, nurturing a society where every member has the opportunity to thrive and contribute meaningfully. Sociology of education serves as a powerful force for empowerment among individuals with disabilities in Nigeria. The paper recommended among others that; government, non-governmental organization and education philanthropists to provide training and professional development opportunities for educators on inclusive teaching strategies, government should empower individual with disabilities themselves by providing them with opportunities for leadership, advocacy and skill development, teachers and care givers of the people with disability should treat and give them adequate care, love and attention, only specialized teachers with at least a minimum of first degree in special education should be allowed to teach and handle people with disability.

Keywords: Disabilities, Empowering, Extolling, Sociology of Education

Introduction

Sociology of Educational is one of the major sub-fields in sociology and also in the development and production of educational research, teaching and learning process (Saha, 2015). The sociological study of education covers a wide field and is perhaps one of the largest subfields within sociology. Sociology of education as a field is devoted to understanding educational systems; the subject matter ranges from teacher and student interactions to large educational systems and development of countries in the world (Ballantine, Hammack and Stuber, 2017). Walters (2007) quoted in Aslan (2020) stated that Sociology of education at the very early period of the twentieth century was a collaborative effort between sociologists and educators in different countries and it was made possible by their shared efforts and dedication to improving societies. The role of sociology in education is to establish the sociological standpoint and show its appreciation to education. "Sociologists do not regard education solely as a means of realizing abstract ideals of culture, such as humanism or technical specialization, but as part of the process of influencing men and women in the society.

Concept of Disabilities

Disabilities refer to physical, sensory, cognitive, or developmental impairments that may limit an individual's ability to perform certain tasks, engage in activities, or participate fully in society. Disabilities can vary widely in nature and severity, and they may be temporary or permanent, congenital or acquired (Oaks, 2015). The experience of disability is influenced by social, cultural, and environmental factors, as well as by individual characteristics and abilities. Disabilities can impact various aspects of life, including mobility, communication, learning, employment, and social interactions. It's important to recognize that disabilities are diverse and multifaceted, and they should be understood within a broader context of social inclusion, accessibility, and support.

Disability refers to a physical, cognitive, sensory, or developmental impairment that may limit a person's ability to perform certain tasks, participate fully in society, or engage in activities considered typical for their age or social role. Disabilities can vary widely in nature, severity, and impact on an individual's functioning and quality of life. Feedblum (2010) identified different types of disabilities, which included: Physical disabilities: These involve impairments affecting mobility, coordination, or physical functioning, such as paralysis, limb loss, or chronic health

conditions like cerebral palsy or muscular dystrophy. Sensory disabilities: Sensory impairments affect one or more of the senses, including vision (blindness or low vision), hearing (deafness or hearing loss), or touch (loss of sensation or tactile sensitivity). Cognitive disabilities: Cognitive impairments affect intellectual functioning, learning abilities, memory, or problem-solving skills. Examples include intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, and specific learning disabilities like dyslexia or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Psychiatric disabilities: These involve mental health conditions that impact mood, behavior, thought processes, or social interactions, such as depression, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia. Developmental disabilities: Developmental disabilities emerge during childhood and affect physical, cognitive, or emotional development. Examples include Down syndrome, autism, fetal alcohol syndrome, or cerebral palsy.

Disabilities encompass a broad range of perspectives, reflecting varying social, medical, and cultural understandings of disability. Here are some key concepts: Medical Model of Disability: This model views disability as a medical condition or impairment located within the individual (Aslan, 2020). It focuses on diagnosing and treating the individual's impairment to enable them to function within society. Chiwendu (2020) stated that medical model often prioritizes cure or rehabilitation and may overlook the social and environmental barriers that contribute to disability. Social Model of Disability: In contrast to the medical model, the social model of disability emphasizes the role of societal barriers and discrimination in creating disability. Haruna (2017) stated that disability is not solely an individual's impairment but is also shaped by inaccessible environments, discriminatory attitudes, and exclusionary practices. Disability can also be defined as physical, cognitive, sensory, or developmental impairment that may limit a person's ability to perform certain tasks, participate fully in society, or engage in activities considered typical for their age or social role. Disabilities can vary widely in nature, severity, and impact on an individual's functioning and quality of life.

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1.   **Physical disabilities:** These involve impairments affecting mobility, coordination, or physical functioning, such as paralysis, limb loss, or chronic health conditions like cerebral palsy or muscular dystrophy.

2. **Sensory disabilities:** Sensory impairments affect one or more of the senses, including vision (blindness or low vision), hearing (deafness or hearing loss), or touch (loss of sensation or tactile sensitivity).

3. **Cognitive disabilities:** Cognitive impairments affect intellectual functioning, learning abilities, memory, or problem-solving skills. Examples include intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, and specific learning disabilities like dyslexia or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

4. **Psychiatric disabilities:** These involve mental health conditions that impact mood, behavior, thought processes, or social interactions, such as depression, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia.

5. **Developmental disabilities:** Developmental disabilities emerge during childhood and affect physical, cognitive, or emotional development. Examples include Down syndrome, autism, fetal alcohol syndrome, or cerebral palsy.

Concept of Education

Education can be understood as the systematic process of acquiring knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes through various means such as schooling, training, and life experiences. It aims to develop individuals intellectually, socially, emotionally, and physically, enabling them to understand the world, engage with it critically, and contribute meaningfully to society. According to Oaks (2015) education is the training of an individual in line with his culture and innovations within it to become an acceptable member of the society with conduct, character and behavior for positive contribution to the growth and development of such society. Education the systematic process of acquiring knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits through various formal and informal means. Freire (1970) stated that education involves teaching and learning activities that take place in educational institutions such as schools, colleges, and universities, as well as through self-directed study and life experiences. Oliver (1990) viewed that education encompasses the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits. It's about fostering intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development to prepare individuals to contribute to society and lead fulfilling lives. Dewey (1938) pointed out that education can occur through formal schooling, informal learning experiences, and self-directed study. It's essential for personal growth, societal progress, and the advancement of civilization Education aims to promote personal growth,

intellectual development, socialization, and the acquisition of skills necessary for individuals to participate effectively in society. It plays a crucial role in shaping individuals, communities, and societies, fostering cultural transmission, social mobility, economic development, and lifelong learning. Education also involves instilling ethical and moral values, fostering personal growth, and promoting lifelong learning (Durkheim, 1897 Durkheim).

Education serves several important functions in society:

1.   **Individual Development:** Education promotes personal growth by imparting knowledge, skills, and values necessary for individuals to thrive in various aspects of life.

2.   **Socialization:** It teaches individuals the norms, values, customs, and traditions of society, helping them become responsible citizens and contributing members of their communities.

3.   **Cultural Preservation:** Education preserves and transmits cultural heritage, language, history, and traditions from one generation to another, fostering a sense of identity and belonging.

4.   **Economic Development:** It equips individuals with the skills and competencies needed to participate in the workforce, driving economic growth and prosperity.

5.   **Social Mobility:** Education can serve as a means for individuals to improve their social and economic status, breaking the cycle of poverty and inequality.

6.   **Critical Thinking:** It cultivates critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving skills, and the ability to analyze information critically, empowering individuals to make informed decisions and navigate complex challenges.

Personal Fulfillment: Education enriches individuals' lives by fostering intellectual curiosity, creativity, and a lifelong passion for learning.

From the sociological perspective, the definition of education may be generally acceptable when viewed from the normative concept of education as set down by Peters (1966) in Chinwendu (2020) further set up three cardinal criteria based on which a decision can be taken as to whether a process merits the name education or not. These criteria are stated below:

i. Education implies the transmission of what is worthwhile to those who are committed to it;

ii. Education must involve knowledge and understanding as well as some kind of cognition, which are not inert in the society.

iii. Education, at least, rules out some procedures of transmission on the ground that they lack willingness and witness on the part of the learner in teaching and learning process.

Concept of Sociology

Sociology is the systematic study of social behaviors and human groups in the society. It delves its' primary in to the influence of social relationships on peoples' attitudes and behaviors and how societies are established and changed. Sociology is the scientific study of society, human behavior, social interactions, and social institutions. It examines how individuals are influenced by their social environments, including culture, norms, values, and social structures, and how they, in turn, shape society. Barton (2005) put forth that sociology seeks to understand various social phenomena such as social inequality, social change, power dynamics, socialization processes, and group behavior. It uses empirical research methods to analyze social patterns, relationships, and institutions, aiming to uncover underlying social dynamics and promote a deeper understanding of human society. Sociology is the study of man's interaction within the society but extends beyond that as it deals with the organization and control of man behaviors and attitudes within the society. According to Schneider and Silver (2010) defined sociology as the study of the formation and transformation of groups and the relationship of groups and group members with one another in the society. Sociology also involves the study of human groups and how they operate through established institutions and institutionalized patterns of behaviors and attributes which are more or less adapted to the specific functions of society assigned to each institution (Silver, 2015).

Concept of Sociology of Education

Sociology of education can be defined as the study of how educational institutions and systems interact with society, shaping and being shaped by social processes, structures, and inequalities. Etieyibo and Omiegbe (2016) views that sociology of education is a study of the social aspects of education; it examines the relationship between education and society, and explores how educational institutions shape and are shaped by social forces. While Sightsavers (2021) defined sociology of education is the study of how education operates as a mechanism of cultural reproduction, perpetuating social inequalities through the transmission of cultural capital and the reproduction of social class. Ayub (2021) sociology of education is the investigation of the social processes that occur within educational institutions, including the role of teachers, students, administrators, and the broader social context in shaping educational outcomes and opportunities. The social functions of sociology of education, are included; socialization, reproduction of social hierarchies, and the transmission of cultural values and norms (Ewang, 2019).

Sociology is the study of society, human behavior, and the social interactions that occur within groups, communities, and institutions. It explores how individuals are influenced by their social environments and how societal structures shape human behavior. Ainscow, M., & Miles, S. (2009) stated that Sociology examines various aspects of society, including culture, social norms, social institutions, inequality, social change, and power dynamics. Sociology aims to understand and explain patterns of social behavior and their consequences for individuals and society as a whole. Sociology of education examines how social institutions and structures, like schools and educational systems, impact society and individuals. It delves into issues such as educational inequality, social mobility, cultural reproduction, and the role of education in shaping social norms and values. Singh (1992) opines that, sociology of education as that discipline which applied the general principles and findings of sociology to the process of educational setting**.**

Contributions of Sociology of Education to People with Disabilities in Nigeria

1.   Understanding Social Dynamics: Sociology of education offers valuable insights into the social dynamics surrounding disability, including the construction of disability identities, the reproduction of stigma and discrimination, and the influence of societal attitudes and norms on the educational experiences of individuals with disabilities (Shajae, 2017).

2.   Critical Analysis of Educational Systems: Sociologists of education analyze the structural barriers and inequalities within educational systems that impact people with disabilities, such as inaccessible physical environments, discriminatory policies and practices, and limited access to resources and support services (Sataphathy, 2016).

3.   Advocacy and Policy Development: Sociology of education research informs advocacy efforts and policy development aimed at promoting inclusive education policies, accommodations, and supports for people with disabilities (Hill, Macrine & Gabbard, 2014). By highlighting systemic injustices and advocating for policy changes, sociologists contribute to the creation of more equitable and accessible educational environments.

4.   Examining Intersectionality: Sociology of education acknowledges the intersectionality of disability with other social categories such as race, class, gender, and sexuality. By considering how multiple forms of oppression intersect and compound each other, sociologists provide a more nuanced understanding of the experiences of marginalized individuals with disabilities and advocate for more intersectional approaches to inclusive education (Seefeltd, 2015).

5.   **Empowering Marginalized Voices:** Through qualitative research methods such as interviews, participant observation, and narrative analysis, sociologists amplify the voices and experiences of people with disabilities, providing a platform for their perspectives to be heard and informing efforts to center their needs and priorities within educational discourse and decision-making processes (Safri & Vajpeyi, 2016).

6.   **Critical Analysis of Social Structures:** Sociology of education provides a framework for critically analyzing the social structures, norms, and inequalities that contribute to the marginalization of people with disabilities in Nigeria. By examining the societal attitudes, cultural beliefs, and institutional practices that perpetuate discrimination and exclusion, sociologists can identify barriers to access and participation within the educational system (Sataphathy, 2016).

7.   **Advocacy for Inclusive Policies:** Sociologists of education play a key role in advocating for inclusive education policies and practices that promote equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Through research, policy analysis, and collaboration with stakeholders, sociologists can contribute to the development and implementation of policies that address the diverse needs of students with disabilities and ensure their full integration into mainstream educational settings (Sataphathy, 2016).

8.   **Understanding Intersectionality:** Sociology of education acknowledges the intersectionality of disability with other social identities, such as race, gender, class, and ethnicity. By considering how multiple forms of oppression intersect and interact, sociologists can provide a more nuanced understanding of the experiences of individuals with disabilities in Nigeria and advocate for more intersectional approaches to inclusive education that address the unique needs of marginalized groups (Safri & Vajpeyi, 2016).

9.   **Promoting Social Change:** Sociology of education is instrumental in promoting social change and challenging ableism, stigma, and discrimination against people with disabilities in Nigerian society. Through research, education, and advocacy, sociologists can raise awareness about the rights and capabilities of individuals with disabilities, challenge stereotypes and misconceptions, and work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable society for all (Ballatin & HHammack, 2009).

10.   **Empowering Individuals and Communities:** Sociology of education empowers individuals with disabilities and their communities by amplifying their voices, advocating for their

rights, and promoting self-advocacy and collective action. By fostering a sense of agency, autonomy, and belonging, sociologists can help individuals with disabilities in Nigeria navigate educational systems, access resources and support services, and actively participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives.

Implications of Sociology of Education to People with disabilities in Nigeria

1.   **Policy Development and Implementation:** Sociology of education research informs the development and implementation of policies and legislation aimed at promoting inclusive education for individuals with disabilities in Nigeria. By identifying barriers to access and participation, sociologists contribute to the creation of policies that address the diverse needs of students with disabilities and ensure their rights to education are upheld (Brown, 2008).

2.   **Advocacy for Accessibility and Accommodation:** Sociologists of education advocate for the creation of accessible and inclusive learning environments that accommodate the diverse needs of individuals with disabilities (Marker, 2016). This includes advocating for physical accessibility, assistive technologies, specialized instructional methods, and support services to facilitate meaningful participation and learning outcomes for students with disabilities.

3.   **Addressing Discrimination and Stigma:** Sociology of education sheds light on the societal attitudes, cultural beliefs, and institutional practices that perpetuate discrimination and stigma against people with disabilities in Nigeria. By raising awareness and challenging stereotypes, sociologists work towards creating a more inclusive and accepting society where individuals with disabilities are valued and respected (Silver, 2010).

4.   **Promoting Empowerment and Self-Advocacy:** Sociology of education empowers individuals with disabilities in Nigeria by promoting self-advocacy, self-determination, and empowerment (Goodsky and Felt, 2008). By providing individuals with the knowledge, skills, and resources to advocate for their rights and navigate educational systems, sociologists help individuals with disabilities assert their agency and achieve their educational goals.

5.   **Intersectional Approaches:** Sociology of education recognizes the intersectionality of disability with other social identities such as gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (Blackstone, 2008). This intersectional approach ensures that the diverse experiences and needs of individuals with disabilities in Nigeria are considered in educational policies and practices, addressing multiple forms of discrimination and marginalization.

6.   **Research and Evaluation:** Sociology of education research generates evidence-based insights into the experiences, challenges, and successes of individuals with disabilities within the educational system in Nigeria (Trent, 2007). This research informs the development of effective interventions, programs, and strategies to improve educational outcomes and promote social inclusion for individuals with disabilities.

Conclusion

In essence, the sociology of education stands as a beacon of empowerment for individuals with disabilities in Nigeria. Ultimately, by dismantling systemic inequalities and championing inclusive practices, sociology of education paves the way for the empowerment of individuals with disabilities, nurturing a society where every member has the opportunity to thrive and contribute meaningfully. Sociology of education serves as a powerful force for empowerment among individuals with disabilities in Nigeria. By meticulously scrutinizing the social structures and systems that impede their access to education and socio-economic opportunities, sociology of education unveils the barriers that hinder their progress. Through advocacy for inclusive policies and raising awareness, it champions the cause of inclusivity and equity, fostering a society where everyone, regardless of ability, can thrive. In doing so, sociology of education not only empowers individuals with disabilities but also enriches the fabric of Nigerian society, promoting diversity, acceptance, and social progress.

Recommendations

In the view of the above, the paper made the following recommendations:

1.   Government, non-governmental organization and education philanthropists to provide training and professional development opportunities for educators on inclusive teaching strategies.

2.   Government should empower individual with disabilities themselves by providing them with opportunities for leadership, advocacy and skill development.

3.   Teachers and care givers of the people with disability should treat and give them adequate care, love and attention.

4.   Only specialized teachers with at least a minimum of first degree in special education should be allowed to teach and handle people with disability.

5.   Organize workshop, seminars and community outreach programs to educate stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and community leaders about the importance of inclusive education

and the role of sociology in achieving it.

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