TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION: A SENSIBLE APPROACH TO PREVENT STUDENT'S DROPOUT FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN LABASA, FIJI ISLANDS

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Abstract:

Quality education was one of the Sustainable Development Goal from the 17th Sustainable Development Goals adopted in 2015, which aimed to establish the comprehensive and fair quality of education and improve lifelong learning hope for all the children around the globe. This study is set out to see how the Ministry of Education Heritage & Arts in the Pacific nation country of Fiji is playing its role in sustaining and meeting the targets of achieving the SDG of "Quality Education". The main aim of Quality Education is "no child left behind". To achieve this, the Ministry of Education Heritage & Arts introduced technical vocational education through the conversion of some of the schools to the Technical College of Fiji. The primary purpose of Technical Vocational Education was to prevent students dropouts from secondary schools. The data was collected from two prominent secondary schools in Fiji, employing a qualitative approach through questionnaires. The questionnaire contained seven open-ended questions, which were then analyzed qualitatively. The results indicated that our countries Ministry of Education is playing its role in sustaining and meeting the SDG targets of "Quality Education".

Introduction:

The United Nationals General Assembly in 2015 adopted seventeen SDGs, and according to Pellser (2018), they were "no poverty; zero hunger; good health and well-being; quality education; gender equality; clean water and sanitation; affordable and clean energy; decent work and economic growth; industry, innovation and infrastructure; reduced inequality; sustainable cities and communities; responsible consumption and production; climate action; life below water; life on

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land; peace and justice strong institutions; and, partnerships to achieve the goals". Learning objectives of each SDG were adopted in 2015, and these objectives need to be achieved by 2030. Quality education is amongst the vital goals of the sustainable development set by the United Nations that has been adopted in 2015. In Fiji's education system, the education and policy developers are working hand in hand to make learning and teaching a quality one. Many goals in quality education are said to be critical in accomplishing sustainable developments in the country of Fiji; for example, by the end of 2030, all girls and boys will be able to complete their primary and secondary education without any cost. It has already started in Fiji from early childhood education to secondary education is free of cost. The concern here is that the dropout rate of students in secondary schools in past years had laid our country behind in acquiring the sustainable development goal targets of all males and females to have an affordable quality primary, secondary and technical education. However, the Ministry of Education in the country is working hand in hand with the stakeholders to prevent these student's dropouts by bringing Technical Vocational Education to our country known as The Technical College of Fiji.

The Technical College of Fiji was opened in 2015 by converting some schools such as Nadi College, Labasa Arya College, and Nabua Sanatan School into Technical Colleges (MEHA, 2015). One of the purposes of converting these schools to Technical College was to minimize the increasing rate of student dropout from secondary schools around the country. This research project will be based on how the Ministry of Education in my country is playing its role in sustaining and meeting the targets of quality education by introducing technical vocational education through the conversion of schools to the Technical College of Fiji.

Literature Review:

SDG 4: Quality Education

From the 17 sustainable development goals, quality education is the 4th SDG. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has set its benchmark that by 2030 all the children around the globe should have access to some form of quality education so that they are ready for their future. According to Baratiseng, Thangeda and Mompati (2016), "Quality education entails the following aspects; learning resources, technology, program enrolled, modules done, lecturing methodology, attachments, qualifications, co-curricular activities, performance awards, students and lecturers perspective in the institution operating management also their opinions and appraisal toward education" (p. 9). The motivation behind quality education has been and dependably will enable and bestow ability and knowledge in learners. Hence it is significant that the education a child persuades must be of certain good quality. The SDG of Quality education aimed to "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (United Nations Statistics Division , 2018). This means that all the children in all the countries should be given priorities in attaining formal and informal education by 2030. The sustainable development goal of quality education also plays a vital role in achieving other sustainable development goals. It is the core of other SDGs. As Ferguson, Ilisko, Roofe and Hill (2018) mentioned, education can help people break out of cycles of unemployment and poverty by opening

up job opportunities, reducing societal disparities, and providing the information and skills they need to live sustainable lifestyles. Therefore it is an important task for the Ministry of Education in the countries to see that all the children are educated. There are many reasons where the Ministry of Education cannot meet the targets of SDG 4. One of the reasons is the high rate of student dropouts from secondary schools.

Students Dropouts

Student dropouts in the pacific have been a serious problem in the education sector. There are many reasons why students drop out of school. Many researchers have defined school dropouts in many different ways. Many have said the reason behind the student's dropout is due to failure in their academic performance. Krstić, Ilić and Videnović (2017) defined dropouts as the Children who drop out of school before completing the academic year in which they began, i.e., those who do not have the right to get a final grade for that academic year and to be awarded an official record proving they completed that year of primary or secondary school. According to Estevao and Álvares (2014), formal and functional are the two types of definitions of dropouts. The formal definition of a student's dropout is leaving the school before completing the studies.

In contrast, functional definition deals with the effects of the dropouts on whether the child has attained its qualification so that he/she is successful in their life, both professional and social. It is a concern for the Ministry of Education on the increasing number of dropouts in our country of Fiji. From the statistics provided by the Ministry of Education, Heritage & Arts (2014), a total of 20175 students were enrolled in Year 12 and Year 13 around all schools in Fiji; however, 19591 students sat for the Year 12 and Year 13 examination. These statistics show around 584 students did not sit for the exam, and these were the number of dropouts in 2014. Likewise, in another statistic by (Ministry of Education Heritage & Arts, 2015) a total of 21523 students were enrolled in Year 12 and year 13 around the schools in Fiji; however, 19324 students sat for the Year 12 and Year 13 examination. These statistics show that a vast number of dropouts of 2199 were encountered in 2015. The majority of the students who are dropouts have poor academic performance. There are many solutions in which the high rate of student dropouts can be minimized.

Technical Vocational Education

Technical vocational education is one of the initiatives by many governments in the Pacific to prevent student dropouts from secondary schools. According to UNESCO (2001), Technical Vocational education is defined as the "aspects of all educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences, and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding, and knowledge relating to occupants in various sectors of economic and social life" (p. 7). Therefore Vocational Education plays a key role in industrial development and the progress of the social status of any developing country. Furthermore, Alam (2008) considered the Technical Vocational subjects such as agricultural science, computer science, information technology, garment and textile technology, fashion design, cookery studies, carpentering and joinery, mechanical studies. Also mentioned by Alam (2008) that Technical

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vocational education plays a pivotal role in the student's life for those children who could not cope with the academic works in secondary education by getting enrolled in these basic trade subjects at Technical Vocational schools. It will prevent student dropout and decrease the unemployment rate, which will also reduce the increased number of poverty and crime cases. This is like "killing several birds with one stone", as claimed by (Lewin, 1993, p. 14). Akyempong (2002) Pointed out that Technical Vocational Education is not only for the economic growth of a country but also for political, cultural and social contributions. It is essential for small island developing states to have some form of Technical Vocational education in their education system in helping the growth of the country's industrial and economic development. Another research done by Chandra (2009) indicated that another way to attain further qualification for future employment for the students who were dropouts in secondary education was through Technical Vocational institution. However, she found out that due to geographical isolation and availability of transportation was a significant concern for the dropout's students to get technical Vocational Education.

Background Context

Quality education was one of the sustainable development goals that were developed in 2015 by UNESCO. This goal aimed to "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (United Nations Statistics Division , 2018). This means by 2030, all the female and male students should have some form of formal and informal education so that they are ready for their future in terms of employment, social and political life. However, many students drop out of secondary schools has been a significant drawback in achieving this sustainable development goal. Many countries formulated their new policies in the education system to reduce student dropouts from secondary schools. According to Ladd (2017), a "no child left behind act" (p. 461) was introduced in 2001 by the American government to reduce the students' dropout in the United States and European countries. As mentioned in a critical review by Witte, Cabus, Thyssen, and Groot (2013) that this act aimed for a 90 percent average high school graduation rate, but the latter said that by 2012, at least 85 percent of all 22-year-olds in the European Union would complete upper-secondary education and no more than 10% of all kids would leave school early. However, schools around the globe still have this serious problem of students drop out of secondary schools. To solve this problem, researchers like Harvey (2001) have suggested that Technical Vocational education could be a logical approach to solve students' dropouts from secondary schools. The same has been followed in Fiji. In 2015 the Fiji government established 3 technical institutes and named them The Technical College of Fiji. This study focuses on how Technical Vocational education in a country can solve students' dropouts when they are at the secondary level.

Research methods:
Participant

There was 10 participant of this small scale research project. This participant was the teachers of 2 prominent secondary schools in Labasa. These included 5 secondary teachers from a

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large-scale school and 5 teachers from a small-scale school. Of the 5 small-scale school teachers, 2 were females while 2 were males, and one was the school principal. These small-scale school teachers shared an average teaching experience of 8 years; the head of the school had the most experience years of teaching of 18 years, from which 7 years being the principal of the same school. Of the 5 large-scale school teachers, 2 were male teachers, and 2 were female teachers, while one was the school principal. The average years of teaching experience for these secondary teachers were 10 years, the highest being the school's principal of 21 years of teaching experience in which 8 years being the principal of the school. These teachers have taught years 9, 10, 11, 12, and year 13 for years and were all TEVT teachers. The sample breakdown is being tabulated below in Table 1

Small scale school Teachers (n=5)	Large scale school teachers (n=5)
Male = 2	*Male = 2*
Female = 2	*Female = 2*
Principal (male) =1	*Principal (male) =1*
Average teaching experience=8 years	*Average teaching experience =10*

Table 1- Participant

Instrument

To collect the data, participants of the small scale research project were asked to complete a questionnaire designed on the analysis of how the Ministry of Education in the country is playing its role in sustaining and meeting the targets of achieving the SDG of quality education for all. This is done by introducing Technical Vocational education through the conversion of schools to Technical College of Fiji to prevent students dropouts from secondary schools. While filling the questionnaires, the teachers were told to use their teaching experience to enhance their comments. The names and personal detail were not taken from the teachers. Only biographical data such as number of years of teaching, number of schools taught, number of years of leadership roles were asked from the teachers. Since teachers were busy with the learning and teaching process in schools, they were given two days to complete the questionnaires. A guideline of open-ended questions was given to the teachers to complete the questionaries', and they are as follows:

1. One of the sustainable development goals is Quality education. What does quality education mean to you?
2. Do you think our countries ministry of education is playing its role in sustaining and meeting the targets of the sustainable development goals of quality education? If yes, then explain how?
3. Why do students drop out of secondary schools?
4. Do you think the rate of student dropouts from secondary schools has increased or decreased from past years?
5. Where are these students going who are dropouts from secondary schools?
6. What does Technical vocational school mean to you?

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7. How is technical vocational education helping our country sustain and meet the targets of the sustainable development goals of quality education?

All the participants completed the task, and it was pleasing to note that all the participants attempted all the questions in the questionnaire. The scripts were analyzed and discussed under the following subtopics:

I.   Sustainable development goal 4 - Quality education
II. Student's dropout from secondary schools
III. How Technical Vocational Education is playing its role in sustaining and meeting the targets of the sustainable development goals of quality education.

Results and Discussion:
         Once the questionnaire was analyzed, and the sub-topics were designed it was discussed with the relevant literature review.

Sustainable development goal 4 - Quality education
         All the participants were able to explain the meaning of quality education. The common feedbacks were the standard of learning and teaching process that can achieve the ministry of education's vision and mission. All the participants understood that quality education was the 4th SDGs that UNESCO developed in 2015. The goal of quality education is aimed to "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (United Nations Statistics Division , 2018). Nearly all the participants agreed that our countries' Education System is doing its best to achieve the SDG set in 2015 as Quality education. Some of the typical comments were:
Yes, our education system is working to achieve quality education by integrating ICT into the education system. In addition, our government is giving free education so that everyone has access to education.
As mentioned by the (Ministry of Education,Heritage & Arts, 2014) the government will fund free education for primary and secondary school students in Fiji. In summary, it was pleasing to note that the teachers understand the need for quality education and how the government is working to help UNESCO achieve its SDG of quality education by 2030. However, when the education is free, is there all the students progress to year 13 and then go to tertiary level?

Student's dropout from secondary schools
         It was noted that all the participants highlighted the issue of student's dropout from secondary schools. The government is working very hard to achieve the SDG of quality education; however, some students cannot complete their secondary education, and they are tagged as dropouts. The common reason why students drop out from the teacher's perception was their poor academic performance. Also agreed by the researchers Lyche (2010); Rumberger and Lim (2008) that students drop out from secondary education is due to their academic achievement. Those

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students who score more marks are the ones who are retained in the schools for a different level of education. From the teacher's perception, the student's dropout rate has increased in recent areas. According to one of the comments from the questionnaire which was the principal of the school said that: *Since 2016 more students have dropout from our school, especially after achieving fewer marks in year 11. These students came to me and asked for clearance as they wanted to join the technical college of Fiji that was just recently opened in their area.*

In summary, all the 10 participants of the questionnaire gave their feedback that students are dropping out from secondary schools, and most of them are from year 11. The most common reason why students drop out is due to their academic performance. The majority of the students who are dropouts from secondary school join the Technical Vocational education, which will be discussed next.

How Technical Vocational Education playing their role in sustaining and meeting the targets of the sustainable development goals of quality education.

All the 10 participants from the questionnaire agreed that those students who are dropouts from secondary schools get enrolled in a technical college. These dropout students are the ones who have attained fewer marks, so they move to Technical Vocational education which is more on practical work. In 2015 the ministry of education established 3 technical colleges around Fiji. In 2016, 8 more Technical colleges were established, taking in mind the geographical and transportation problems faced by other students (Technical College of Fiji, 2016). Also mentioned by Chandra (2009) "technical vocational education programs have been vigorously promoted to help students learn contents and subjects that may cater for their individual needs, and enable them to continue with their education rather than being a school dropout" (p. 53). The ministry of education is playing its role in achieving the targets of sustainable development goals of quality education which aimed to ensure that all males and females have some form of formal and informal education by 2030. Those students who were dropouts from secondary schools have also been allowed to complete their education in a technical college. Hence Technical College plays a vital role in preventing student's dropouts from all forms of education. This means that those students who were dropouts from secondary schools will go to Technical College of Fiji to get the technical vocational education leaving no child behind from educating themselves.

Conclusion and Implications:

The data collected reflects that all the teachers who participated in this small scale research agreed that the Ministry of Education in Fiji is doing their part to ensure that all the children in our country should have formal and informal education 2030. Due to a high number of students drop out of secondary education, the Ministry of Education established Technical Colleges so that those who were low academic archives can get enrolled at the Technical College of Fiji, which will also help them to brighten their future in term of job opportunity as well as social status. Technical college was established in 2015 with only 3 colleges. Still, in 2016, 8 more schools around the country were converted to technical college so that more children can get access to vocational

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education, leaving no child left behind. Many schools agreed that technical vocational education would prevent student's dropout from secondary education. Finally, I would like to recommend that the Ministry of Education should also establish Technical Colleges in the interior parts of Fiji too such as marine time schools, because students who are dropout from there find it difficult to come to town and cities to attend a technical college. The students in those areas will be left behind. This will be where our country will fail to achieve the sustainable development goal of quality education, which aims to ensure all the children are educated with bother formal and informal education for a sustainable development future.

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Appendix 1

QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: _____   (Optional)
Position: _____
Age: _____
Gender: _____
Years of Teaching Experience: _____
Years of Leadership Experience: _____

1. One of the sustainable development goals is Quality education. What does quality education mean to you?
   _____
   _____

2. Do you think our countries ministry of education playing its role in sustaining and meeting the targets of the sustainable development goals of quality education? If yes then explain how?
   _____
   _____

3. Why do students drop out of secondary schools?
   _____
   _____
   _____

4. Do you think the rate of student dropouts from secondary schools has increased or decreased in past five years?
   _____
   _____

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5. Where are these students going who are dropouts from the secondary schools?

    _____

    _____

6. What do Technical vocational educations means to you?

    _____

    _____

7. How technical vocational education is helping our country in sustaining and meeting the targets of the sustainable development goals of quality education?

    _____

    _____

A hearty thanks for the timely completion of the given questionnaire.Be assured that the information provided will be only used for research completion and kept confidential.

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