

ENHANCING SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GOALS OF EDUCATION FOR ALL BY YEAR 2015 FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN NIGERIA



Iroegbu, Umunna Victor

*Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation Sciences,
Faculty of Education, University of Jos, Plateau State*

&

Mwapishak, Mikitda Sani (Mnim)

Otana Hearing Edu-Health Services Jos, Plateau State

Abstract

The paper examined ways for enhancing successful implementation of the goals of education for all by year 2015 for children with special needs in Nigeria. In doing this, the paper discussed issues such as the concept of EFA, children with special needs and EFA goals, benefits of EFA goals to children with special needs. Finally, the paper pointed out way forward for the realization of the desired goals of education for all by year 2015 for children with special needs in Nigeria. Among others are that schools must be challenged and empowered to the educational needs of children in their communities just as the families of these children are challenged to provide best possible family life. Again, stakeholders in the education of children with special needs need to work collaboratively in order to realize significant result in the end. Therefore, there should be a strong monitoring and implementation body on education for all at both state and local government levels to ensure strict compliance without diversion of funds and other related matters.

Introduction

The concept of “Education for All” evolved from a mere privilege to a right for all. It is a committed universal education initiative requiring attention to all children including those with special educational needs. This initiative was launched in 1990 by 155 countries and international organizations (UNESCO, 2009). It was at the World Conference on EFA that participants pledged to universalize primary education; and to substantially reduce illiteracy by the year 2015. The commitment by the international community to achieve EFA was again upheld at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal in the year 2000. At this forum, 164 governments pledged to achieve six EFA goals; and identified a number of supportive initiatives towards inclusion by the year 2015 (UNESCO, 2009).

The world’s government adoption of the six EFA goals; and the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in year 2000 marked a twin most important framework in the field of education. Both EFA and Millennium Development goals are

complementary; hence Irina Bokova, a UNESCO's Director - General says, "When you fund education, you are securing progress towards all the millennium Development Goals." The EFA goals include issues such as expanding early childhood care and education; providing free and compulsory primary education for all; promoting learning and life skills for young people and adults; increasing adult literacy by 50%; achieving gender parity in education by 2005; gender equality by 2015; and improving the quality of education (unesco.org.uk/education_for_all/Jomtien, 2009). Similarly, the Millennium Development Goals are aimed at eradicating extreme poverty and hunger; achieving universal primary education; promoting gender equality and empower women; reducing child mortality; improving maternal health; combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; and developing a global partnership for development (Wikipedia, 2013).

The UNESCO sponsored education for all initiative states that all children including those with special needs are entitled to equal educational opportunity. Following this development, the UNESCO and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) conceived that inclusion is the preferred approach to providing schooling for children with special needs (Gordon, 2001). Consequently, inclusive education has received more attention in the last few years than before. Both the Salamanca Statement on inclusive education (UNESCO, 1994); and the Millennium Development Goals (Dakar Framework for Action, 2000) aimed at achieving education for all; and ending poverty and hunger. These goals are unachievable without special consideration for children with special needs. The EFA key stakeholders must therefore, invest in programme initiatives that will help make schooling in home communities possible for all children.

According to UNESCO (1999), the 'Salamanca Statement' set forth the challenge to provide education to "... all children, regardless of their physical, intellectual, emotional, social, linguistic or other conditions." The provision of this service was to be in 'ordinary schools.' Two sections of the statement endorsed by 300 participants representing 92 countries and 25 international organizations in 1994 are notable:

'Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all...' (Article 2, Salamanca Statement).

'Education policies at all levels... should stipulate that children with disabilities should attend their neighbourhood school that is the school that would be attended if the child did not have a disability'... (Article 18, Salamanca Statement).

Given the above situations, therefore, it is imperative to note that sustainable EFA programme requires adequate funding of community schools. Inclusion and good educational practices that come with it offer hope to a nation that considers equal

educational opportunity for and partnership by all her citizens. In this paper, the authors intend to examine ways of enhancing successful implementation of the goals of education for all by year 2015 for children with special needs in Nigeria. In doing this, relevant issues such as children with special needs and EFA goals, benefits of EFA goals to children with special needs, and way forward for sustaining and improving EFA movement in Nigeria shall be discussed.

Children with Special Needs and EFA goals

Children with special needs are those with various impairments or unusually high intellectual abilities which prevent them from benefiting from the general education classroom activities unless special class arrangement that takes cognizance of their unique learning needs is put in place. They include the gifted and talented, children with hearing impairment, visual impairment, intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, orthopaedic and health impairment, speech and language impairment, emotional and behavioural disorders, autism and cerebral palsy (Ozoji, 2005). The conditions of these children can scientifically be traced to heredity, diseases, infection, age, nutritional deficiency, accident and occupational/environmental hazards. Again, these children no doubt do encounter difficulties when their families seek to include them in the regular education system; but they have opportunities to excel where parent-based groups and ministries work in partnership to nurture new approaches and models.

Education for all is an expanded vision of learning which is inclusive of everyone; and its ultimate aim is sustainable development. Nevertheless, all aspects of the education system need improvement to ensure excellence so that desired and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all learners. To achieve EFA goals, there must be a liable system of educational governance and management and seriousness in implementing educational policies by the participating governments (Abednego, 2006). Nigeria is one of the EFA participating countries whose education policies are very good, but regrettably stifled at the level of implementation. However, UNESCO's measures in achieving EFA through its annual Global Monitoring Report (GMR); is the prime instrument for assessing the progress that countries (Nigeria inclusive) and agencies are making towards achievement of the six EFA goals (UNESCO, 2009).

Education for All (EFA) is an approach which occurs when children of diverse backgrounds with or without special needs learn together in the same classroom as well as interact socially with each other within the regular school setting for a whole day, week, term, and/or year till they graduate. Consequently, it is important that the regular teacher understands the nature and degree of deviation that the child with special needs has to be able to provide effective instruction for him/her. In accordance with the EFA goals, both educational and psycho-social needs of children with special needs are similar to those of their peers who do not have special needs. It has been observed that the strategies, principles, procedures and techniques used with ordinary children can be applied in teaching children with special needs (Isah, 2012).

Educational programmes for children with special needs will require special materials and systematically planned learning activities in order to enable them learn as much as their peers who do not have special needs. Therefore, there is need to engage committed and resourceful teachers who must be able to understand and meet the unique learning needs of these children in the classroom. Teaching children with special needs calls for extra care, patience, diligence, commitment, emotional balance and understanding. According to Garuba (2003) handling these children calls for ability to absorb shock and emotional crisis associated with teaching children who may not be seriously disposed to learn. It is therefore worthwhile that teachers (regular) are well prepared in order to effectively shoulder the tasks that await them in the classroom otherwise; they cannot possibly provide proper instruction or assistance needed by children with special needs.

Benefits of EFA goals to Children with Special Needs

A worthwhile educational programme can be determined by the extent to which it impacts its consumers. Achievement of EFA goals has been an indispensable key to personal and social improvement of children with special needs. This informs the awesome competitions among school children of difference abilities, endowments and backgrounds in the society. For instance, sighted children develop better understanding of children with visual impairment and how to live with them. On the other hand, children with visual impairment have direct impact socially and academically as they relate with their sighted peers in the same environment. This situation came about by the fact that the children learn together; and the school authority and staff recognize and respond to their diverse needs.

Again, research has it that “children with special needs are more likely to learn social skills better in an environment that approximates to normal conditions of growth and development. This is evident in the fact that children with special needs (e.g. the visually impaired) in their early years develop language and some other milestones more effectively if they stay with peers who speak and perform other activities appropriately (Olabisi, 2009 & Bature, 2013). In this regard, education for all brings about collaboration and development of balance curriculum for enriching educational experience of all children; because education cannot be for all until it benefits all.

Education for All (EFA) goals have indeed offered children with special needs the opportunity to fully participate in the nation’s education system in order to actualize their potentialities. In the view of authors to this article, education for all goals where religiously implemented; will give room for children with and without special needs to actively get involved in meaningful learning activities in the same environment without discrimination. Thus, these children stand to benefit educationally and socially too. Indeed, the task of meeting the EFA goals particularly for children with special needs is tedious but must be achieved given the international conventions and commitments.

Contrary to the benefits of ‘education for all,’ negative societal attitude towards children with special needs and their education matters has hampered the achievement of education for all in Nigeria. Okeke (2003) corroborated that public apathy towards children with special needs is the major intrusion to effective implementation of education for all. Mwapishak (2012) lamented that the attitude of the regular teachers towards education for all is still a matter of concern in Nigeria. Similarly, parental perceptions of the idea of education for all have shown that “parents of the so-call normal children do follow the traditional attitude direction in their reaction towards children with special needs.” Hence, some of these parents would not like their children to mix up with children with one type of disability or the other.

Again, lack of adequate teaching skills to meet the unique needs of children with special needs by the regular teachers; results to unhealthy learning. The teacher’s skills, knowledge, experience, ability and capability in the teaching and learning business are most essential factors to the provision of successful inclusion services for children with special needs. If regular teachers do not have the above mentioned competencies, the impact will be greatly and negatively felt by children with special needs. Therefore, regular teachers should be well trained on appropriate inclusion practices through exposure to some elements of special education and skills; especially the use of individualized instruction in providing instructions for children with special needs in ‘education for all’ (EFA) programmes (Chukuka, 2013).

Furthermore, improper classroom management obstructs the attainment of education for all in Nigeria. Okeke in Chukuka (2013) lamented that regular teachers who were asked to cater for children who display a range of social and academic problems are questioning the boundaries of their responsibilities as classroom teachers. The reason for this reaction is not far-fetched; they lack appropriate classroom management skills. Improper classroom management can lead to an unkempt physical environment, which poses a threat to effective teaching and learning for children with special needs.

Again, most buildings, service delivery outlets and schools in our society are not built with persons with special needs in mind. For instance, ramps are not provided for one in the wheel chair to be wheeled in to access certain social amenities enjoyed by one’s peers who have no disabilities. It is therefore, impossible to implement education for all (EFA), when the school environments and structures are not child-friendly and conducive for effective teaching and learning.

Lack of latest/well-structured curriculum is another factor that impacts the benefits of EFA for children with special needs. The writers view curriculum as a cumulative tradition of knowledge by goals, objective, content, methods, instructional materials and evaluation. It is sad that the existing curriculum for the ordinary learners is also being used for learners with special needs too. The EFA curriculum should be structured to include all individual learners. This implies that the curriculum should be modified to meet individual child’s learning needs. Ndoh in Chukuka (2013) elaborated

that the general education curriculum should be designed to put into consideration the physical, mental, aptitude, age, ability and capability of each learner. Expanding the curriculum to include unique learning needs of learners will make children with special needs to be actively involved; and benefit from education for all (EFA).

Similarly, lack of sophisticated educational materials impacts the benefit that children with special needs stand to enjoy from EFA. Enweroye in Chukuka (2013) noted that learning materials play important role in every learning situation. For instance, educational materials such as braille machine, type recorder, state and stylus, thermoforming machine, braille papers are essential in the education of children with visual impairment. In this respect, non-availability of the aforementioned materials/equipment for this category of children with special needs deprives them maximal benefits from any education for all programme.

Way Forward

In order to enhance successful implementation of the goals of education for all by year 2015 for children with special needs in Nigeria, the following measures should be put into consideration:

1. Stakeholders of EFA need to work collaboratively with one another so that concrete result should be achieved.
2. Government of the day should not hesitate to pass the disability act bill into law. By so doing, the state and local government authorities will act accordingly.
3. A strong monitoring and implementation body on education for all (EFA) at both state and local government levels must be instituted to ensure strict compliance without diversion of funds and other related matters meant for the programme.
4. A paramount step to education of children with special needs is their identification. In this regard, there should be periodic house to house census in order to identify these children for appropriate provision and placement in the nation's educational programmes and services. Thus, proper screening and assessment must be conducted on these children in order to determine their unique educational needs for appropriate early intervention programmes.
5. Appropriate and adequate educational materials and equipment must be provided to enhance the learning capacity of children with special needs in Nigerian schools. In the same vein, trained supportive personnel such as braille instructors; mobility and orientation instructors; speech and language disorders therapists; counselors; sign language interpreters; audiologists; physiotherapists; learning disabilities diagnosticians; etc. must be employed and posted to Nigerian schools where children with special needs are included.

Conclusion

The feasibility of full implementation of education for all (EFA) including children with special needs hinges to a large extent, on abrupt elimination of types of

barriers to educational inclusion. Globally, the 21st century practices in special needs education have laid more emphasis on the right of education for all. The ultimate aim of EFA is to enable all children including those with special needs to be educated in their regular neighborhood community schools. Nevertheless, EFA programme will only thrive if concrete and concerted efforts are directed to eliminate negative perceptions of the idea of 'education for all' in Nigeria.

References

- Abednego, M. (2006). Education for all in 2000. In E.D. Ozoji; I.O. Ezera; N.E. Ezeani; and M. Abednego (Eds.) contemporary issues in special needs education. Jos: Deka Publications.
- Bature, H. (2013). Prospect and problem of inclusive for hearing impaired persons in Nigerian schools. *National Journal of Inclusive Education*, 1 (1), 7 – 12.
- Chukuka, E.U. (2013). *Barrier to effective implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria: Readings in inclusive education*. Jos: Oxford Binders.
- Dakar Framework for Action (2000). Education for all: Meeting our collective commitments. http://www.unesco.org/education/sfa/ed/for_all
- Garuba, A. (2003). Inclusive education in the 21st century: Challenges and opportunities for Nigeria. *Asia Pacific Disability Rehabilitation Journal*, 14 (2), 191 – 200.
- Gordon, P. (2001). *Disability and inclusive education*. A paper presented for the InterAmericana Development Bank Seminar on inclusive and disability, Santiago Chile, March 16.
- Isah, M. S. (2012). *The concept of psychology and the education of the visually impaired*. In E.D. Ozoji (Ed.). Guidance, counseling and special needs education. Ibadan: Glory-land Publishing Company.
- Mwapishak, S. M. (2012). *The role and challenges of special education teachers in inclusive schools in Jos metropolis*. Unpublished B.Sc.Ed Thesis, University of Jos.
- Olabisi, A. (2009). *Child care and special needs education in Nigeria volume 2*. Abuja: CELDA.
- Okeke, B. A. (2003). *School barrier to inclusive education in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Glory-land Publishing Company.
- Ozoji, E.D. (2005). *Special needs education and rehabilitation for beginner professionals*. Jos: Deka Publications.
- UNESCO (1994). *Salamanca Statement and framework for action on special needs education*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO (1999). *Salamanca: Five years on – a review of UNESCO activities in the light of the Salamanca statement and framework for action on special needs education*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO (2009). Education for all assessment. unesco.org.uk/education_for_all/Jomtien
- Wikipedia (2013). An online education on millennium development goals (MDGs).