

Special Needs Children in Inclusive Education: Implications for Teacher Preparation

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Abstract

The concept of Inclusive Education is receiving a lot of concern by Education policy makers, government, special Educators and the larger society in general, because of its numerous benefits as opposed to segregated Education. This paper attempts to define what inclusive education is all about. It further goes to consider the justification for inclusive education and its implications for teacher preparation.

Introduction

The history of children with special needs Education has been in existence informally for a long period. According to Mba (1991) it began informally with the care of physically handicapped children by Christian missionaries. Gradually, other categories of exceptional children were provided for by philanthropists and voluntary organizations in various parts of the country until 1957 when the government of Lagos state Education Act called for the organization of special education in that part of the country. The education of exceptional children all along has been a segregated one. As technology emerges and time changes, mainstreaming or integration was advocated for children with special needs to be integrated into regular schools, for equal right education as contained in the NPE, 1981 (Revised 1998). Other advocates for the rights of the child in Nigeria is the UNICEF which in June 1995, seemed to be in support as more people advocate and give more reasons for mainstreaming.

More advanced and developed countries are advocating for inclusive Education, which is being currently piloted in many countries as contained in the Salamanca (Spain) meeting organized by UNESCO in June 1994. Another pilot study is being done by Jerusalem Centre for Disabled Children (J.C.D.C) on inclusive education. Inclusive education is now the focus for future generations as it is believed to be the education that will be suitable for meeting the needs and aspirations of children with special needs.

What Is Inclusive Education

The Longman Dictionary of contemporary English defines the word “inclusive” as the act of including or state of being included. However, in education, inclusion means enabling pupils/students to participate to the best of their abilities, their disabilities notwithstanding, in the life and work of institutions that mainstream.

The “Charter for Inclusion” states that inclusion is a term, which expresses commitment to educate each child to the maximum extent appropriate in school and classroom he or she would otherwise attend. It involves bringing the support services to the child (rather than moving the child to the services). Similarly, the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (C.S.I.E) of the University of Bristol, England states that Inclusive Education means disabled and non-disabled children and young people learning together in ordinary pre-school provision, schools,

colleges and Universities with appropriate networks of support. Inclusive Education is also defined as a goal to be aimed for, rather than a fixed state to be achieved once and for all.

In June 1994, there was a meeting that brought representatives of governments and international organizations together. This meeting was organized by UNESCO in Salamanca (Spain) for the purpose of forming WORLD CONFERENCE ON SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION. In summary, the meeting adopted the following for the purpose of providing Inclusive Education for Special Needs Children.

- Inclusive Education should be practiced in schools.
- The meeting adopted a framework for action and guiding principles for action by ordinary schools; including access to accommodation by all children, regardless of their physical, intellectual, emotional, social or linguistic conditions.
- That regular schools are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes created by individuals, communities and organizations towards the disabled.
- That Inclusive Education is cost effective.

Justification for Inclusive Education

The idea or concept of Inclusive Education is being imbibed by various organizations and professionals as the most suitable means of providing education for the disabled. The idea has spread like wild fire amongst Nations and organizations of the World because of the numerous advantages inclusive education provides. Among these International Organizations that profess inclusive education are; UNESCO, UNICEF, ILO, WHO, Human Rights and the Rights of the Child. The Justification provided for inclusive Education can be summarized as follows:

- All Children (handicapped or non-handicapped) learn together.
- The handicapped are not devalued or discriminated against because with proper methods and materials, they can compete favourably in most of the academic subjects and social life.
- It will lead to de-emphasizing segregation or labeling some people as special.
- It is cost effective, because if properly handled less money is spent on inclusive education than in segregated schools.
- Social and emotional life of the handicapped are improved and those of the non-handicapped also improve favourably that is to say the non-handicapped children and community develop positive attitudes towards the handicapped.
- There is more commitment and support in inclusive education than in segregated schools. More resources are channeled towards inclusive education than segregated education, particularly in Nigeria.
- In a study conducted by Sebba and Sachdev (1977), it was revealed that inclusive education improves the cognitive skill and behaviour of the handicapped. It was also discovered that there were improvements in pupils with learning difficulties especially in their social and communication skills.

Beneficiaries of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is of numerous benefits to the stakeholders. The stakeholders who benefit from inclusive Education are:

The handicapped Child

- It reduces segregation and isolation of children and parents.
- Implementation of the right of all to education will be effective.
- It helps children to have diminished feelings of prejudice
- It helps prepares students for real life situation, which is the aim of education
- It promotes acceptance of the child.

The parents

- It helps parents to develop a co-operative spirit to fight common courses.
- Parents also mount pressure on schools to develop better teaching strategies
- It promotes support to parents and their handicapped children.
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The non-handicapped students

- They have the opportunity to interact and learn more about the disabled children.
- They will be supporting, helping, instructing and advocating for each other.
- The inclusive education helps non-handicapped to develop positive attitudes towards the handicapped.

The Teachers

- The teachers gain from each other, as they have different methods and strategies.
- The teachers and the handicapped children learn to accept each other's differences and experiences, as they share ideas.

The community

- There is more peace and harmony as there is no pointing of accusing fingers at families with special needs children as they all attend and perform the same tasks in the same school.
- There is effective mobilization of resources for inclusive education services.

The Government

- No Child is denied access to education, his disability not withstanding.
- It is helpful, as Government is able to execute the programme planned with ease because resources are concentrated in one place.
- It is cost effective. Government spends less money on inclusive education.
- The community can interact with Government officials as the community fights a common cause
- The provision of resources are concentrated and channeled appropriately.

Teacher Preparation

For teachers to teach effectively in the inclusive education programme, the World Bank (1994) recommended that:

Teachers need

- motivation
- Professional support

- Better and more appropriate learning materials.
- The curriculum content including methods and materials which they must have adequate knowledge of in order to handle the children must be reformed. In addition to the above, and for teachers to be well prepared for the task ahead of them the following procedure for training should be adopted:
 - The teachers must be **selected** based on certain criteria, including administering exams and interviews to select those who are qualified
 - Teachers must present themselves **willingly** and out of interest to receive training to work with the handicapped children in an integrated setting.
 - During the training, the teacher should be observed to see whether he has interest in working with the handicapped and whether he is demonstrating his abilities towards the education of the handicapped.
 - The curriculum content must be reformed to reflect the specific needs of the teacher and the Nigerian child. This will include the needs of the community or the society.
 - The teacher should be exposed to technological innovations in the education of handicapped and non-handicapped, such as the use of computers, braille, typing and so on. In the curriculum, the teacher must have the major concentration on psychology of learning for both handicapped and non-handicapped children.
 - There should be constant evaluation of the teacher through examinations, assignments, practicum and others to ascertain whether he is doing well on the programme or not.
 - At the end, he should be allowed to go through the final certification assessment, which will bring together examinations, continuous assessment and so on. A professional body should be involved in the process of certification.
 - Finance should play a major role in training the teacher. Funds are needed for payment of tuition fees, books and materials, equipment and field trips.

Implications for Teachers

- **Re-training of teachers:** According to the Charter for inclusion, retraining of teachers is very important as it enables them to work in all settings and play a key role in special educational programmes.

In-service training given teachers helps to improve teacher's performance while on the job. Finally, retraining helps teachers to learn to accept each other's differences and experiences.

Teachers need more funds to be able to pay for services and tuition fees.

- **Equipment:** The teachers need to have a broad knowledge of the equipment to cope with handicapped and non-handicapped children in the class. Adequate equipment should therefore be provided.
- **Curriculum:** This must be expanded to accommodate both handicapped and non-handicapped children. This includes curriculum for special needs and for regular children.
- **Acceptance:** The teacher has to accept both the handicapped and non-handicapped learning and living together.
- **Attitudes of the community and children themselves:** The Community must have favourable attitudes towards the acceptance, of inclusive education to ease the job of the teacher.

Implication for Community

There is need for general awareness of the community, school and public on the importance and needs for inclusive education and the teachers role of teachers.

There have to be institution that offer additional training for teachers. Lack of such institutions creates problems for teacher preparation. The institutions should also be willing to accept teachers for training.

Time: More time should be given to plan and evaluate its success, as it is new in Nigeria. The evaluation may even lead to reforming the curriculum to meet the specific needs of the children.

Conclusion:

Having examined the place of special needs children in inclusive education and the benefits that may accrue to a developing-nation like Nigeria, this paper concludes that there is a lot of implications for teacher preparation if inclusive education is to generate the needed dividends for this country. It is in the light of this that the following recommendations are made. That urgent and sustained attention be paid to the general implementation of inclusive education for special needs children in Nigeria to carry along the teachers that would be invariably needed for the success of this latest development in the provision of educational services for special needs children.

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