
Curriculum Adaptation for Children with Special Needs in an Inclusive Educational Setting

PATRICK, M. AKOS

Introduction

Today, just as in the past before the United Nations conventions and declaration on human rights in particular, "Education for All" (1990), and world conference on "special Needs Education", (1994), children with special needs all over the world are still faced with a number of barriers and hurdles, as they struggled to be educated or trained. The purpose of their educational pursuits is not only for knowledge sake, but most importantly to be able to contribute their quota in the social, cultural, political, religious, economic and educational development of their nation and the world at large (NPE, 2004). The situation is more glaring in developing nations of Asia and sub Sahara African countries like Nigeria. Here, many school aged children drop out of school for reasons of disabilities, inappropriate curriculum and socio-economic and cultural factors.

However, the United Nations Global interventions and strategies offer a global framework obligation to promote, perfect and ensure sustainability for individuals with disabilities. This marks a global shift in attitudes and approaches to children with special needs, who have always been conceived as "object" of charity rather than agents of change and development. Consequently, children with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which accommodate them with a child- centered pedagogy capable of meeting these needs. This will go a long way to discourage exclusion and encourage inclusion and full integration of children with special needs.

An inclusive educational setting is one in which all regular and special children learn together UNESCO, (1994) Stated that the fundamental principles of inclusive school is that all children should learn together whenever possible, regardless of difficulties or difference they may have. Ozoji (2003) re-affirmed that inclusive education is an education option in program carefully designed to educate special needs learners with diverse needs within the re-structured mainstream or school community.

Children with special needs are individuals with unique intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics traits which require special attention, methods, materials and teachers. According to UNESCO (1994) Special needs children include:

the disabled and gifted, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginal areas or groups. In other words, the concept of children with special needs transcend beyond children with sensory or perceptual problems.

The question now is, how can these children with diverse characteristic degree of abilities have access to be educated or trained together? What are the possible challenges and strategies to contend with under inclusive school setting? In this paper, the following issues will be addressed with a view to provide possible answers to the fundamental questions raised:

- (a) Curriculum Access
- (b) Curriculum Adaption
- (c) Types of curriculum of Children with special needs in an inclusive setting;
- (d) Challenges of curriculum adoption for children with special needs in an inclusive setting.
- (e) The impact of curriculum adaptation on the learning process of children with special needs.
- (f) The way forward.

Curriculum Access for Children with Special Needs

Curriculum access refers to the ability of children with special needs to gain entrance and participate fully in the regular curriculum just as any regular pupil or student would. Under the 1975 education for all act, and its reauthorization (1997; 2004) the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), all students, regardless of their abilities, must be given the opportunity to become involved with and progress in the general education curriculum (Orkwis, 1999). Supporting the United Nations declaration of Education for All Act and the reauthorization, the federal government planned, to give meaning to the idea of equalizing educational opportunities for all children, their physical sensory, mental, psychological or emotional disabilities notwithstanding. With this in mind, a diversified and appropriate curriculum for all children with special needs (NPE, 2004 p.48).

What is, however, obtained in practice in most developing nations is that children with disabilities are usually blocked from classroom interaction as a result of the inflexibility of the curriculum arrangements. This usually creates physical, sensory, affective and even cognitive barriers to such children. Again, providing access involves not only supplying textbooks and assistive devices like computers, but requires teachers' competence in handling the situation. This calls for a strategy that special needs educators can employ to give these children access, which is through curriculum adaptation that is not only nationally but internationally accepted and practiced.

Curriculum Adaptation for Children with Special Needs

Adaptation is a modification to the delivery of instructional methods and intended goals of student performance that does not change the content but does slightly change the conceptual difficulty of the curriculum. One important feature of adaptation is that it is a goal driven process. That is teachers and their collaborators need to identify the goals of students before adopting any curriculum.

According to Rose and Meyer (2002), curriculum adaptation refers to modification to the way in which content is represented or presented or in which students engage in and respond to curriculum. Rose and Meyer further observed that such modifications do not alter

the content in any way, but instead, seek to provide multiple means for students to access and respond to the content, often achieved through incorporating the principle of universal design for learning.

Types of Curriculum for Children with Special Needs

There are a number of curriculum that could be used for educating children with special needs in an inclusive setting. Mugu (2010) identified four levels of curriculum that can be implemented within the framework of inclusive setting.

These are, the regular school curriculum, the adopted curriculum, the unique curriculum, and the special curriculum which comprises all that is taught in regular school by regular teachers for regular students. The adapted curriculum involves simplifying, modifying and slowing down the curriculum depending on the circumstances of the exceptional learners. The unique and adopted curricula, are meant to offer basic pre requisite skills to make education worthwhile, while special curriculum is specially designed to address the specific learning needs of special needs children.

The Impact of Curriculum Modifications on the Learning Process

Modifying existing general curriculum has been an effective way to create more accessible learning environments to support all students and indeed teachers and their collaborators in various educational context. Imagine how these children feel when they see, hear, feel the excitement and anxiety of their non-special needs peers behave, as they are all being taught in an "inclusive setting. It is best empathized than sympathized. The situation in most of the schools in public and even private arrangements here in Nigeria and else where in African countries, is lamentable.

Furthermore, one would not be entirely wrong to say that it is as a result of curriculum modifications that the world today enjoys the academic labor of eminent and prominent personalities with disabilities in diverse areas of human endeavor. They include famous scientists and inventors with disabilities like Alexander Graham Bell, the telephone inventor, Thomas A. Edison, the inventor of electric light and record player and Albert Einstein an atomic physicist. (<http://www.reddisability.or.uk/famousmodern/disfamscience.htm>).

In Nigeria, we have such eminent people who have excelled to the highest pinnacle of academic excellence. They include among others, Professor Bitrus Gani, Dr.P.O Mba, and Prof. E. Ojile to mention a few.

Children with special needs are psychologically, emotionally and cognitively challenged as a result of the adapted curriculum and boosts their ego because they feel proud to be part of the inclusive class.

It is hoped that with the impact of globalization, especially on education, the curriculum will be more accessible for all children with diverse needs in an inclusive setting especially in Nigeria and other developing nations.

Challenges of Curriculum Adaptation

Adapting the general curriculum to suit the diverse needs of children with special needs is not without problems and challenges for the children, their teachers and

laborators. Some of these challenges and problems are due to globalization and its attendant implications on education. This is because of the movement of people (labor) and knowledge (technology) across international borders. For instance, new innovations in assistive technology devices for persons with special needs have been produced by manufacturers in compliance to United Nations' expectations. Consequently, there are assistive devices for use in the classrooms, offices, homes, hospitals to mention a few.

However, there are still a number of problems and challenges to contend with in a bit to adapt curriculum for children with special needs, especially in developing countries like Nigeria. Onwubolu (2005), laments that poor funding lack of interest in the education of exceptional children, lack of adequate personnel and equipment are problems deterring the growth and development of special needs education in Delta State of Nigeria. Similarly, Lere and Yakwal (2005), decried the seeming zero legislative base for special education in Plateau state. They, however, were quick to mention efforts being made towards this direction.

Ekwama (2003), outlined some challenges encountered in the field of special needs education to include inadequate and up-to-date equipment and facilities, special teacher training, funding, law and administrative due processes, as key problems inhibiting the growth and development of special needs education in Nigeria.

It appears that the concept and discussions about inclusive education in Nigeria and many nations of the developing world are still at the level of conference paper presentations and policy reformations. Not much is heard or seen on the issue of implementation and evaluation of these policies and communiqués. There is, therefore, the need for a re-think towards this attitude.

Recommendations on the Way Forward

Since the goal of the inclusive teaching model is to integrate teaching methods through adaptive instruction that children with different abilities and disabilities can benefit, it becomes necessary then to:

Adapt a curriculum that has universal considerations in addition to National Educational Goals. A universally designed curriculum which emphasizes a design of instructional materials and activities that allows learning goals to be attainable by individuals with wide differences in their abilities to see, learn, speak, move, read, write, understand English, attend, organize, engage and remember becomes imperative (Orkwis, 1999). According to Orkwis, such a flexible, yet challenging curriculum gives teachers the ability to provide each child or student access to the subject area without having to adapt the curriculum repeatedly to meet special needs.

There is the need to adequately prepare teachers both special and general, so as to effectively teach curriculum in an inclusive setting.

There is also need for adequate funding to cater for staff welfare, up-to-date assistive technology devices and other recurrent expenditure such as logistics by Federal, State and Local Governments.

There is the need for our universities, colleges of education and other non-governmental organizations to partner together to re-position the curriculum of special

needs education to be more functional and responsive to the present trends – inclusive education and globalization.

Conclusion

From the forgoing discussion in the paper, one thing stands clear, that is, the seeming lack of preparedness in the provision of the necessary factors of inclusive education in Nigeria and other developing nations. This is evident in the numerous challenges that confront not only children with special needs but parents, teachers and the internal and external collaborators. Hence, Ozoji (2005) rightly observed that there is very little to talk about quality assurance in special needs education, and warns that unless urgent control measures in special needs education in Nigeria, are put in place the situation will continue to deteriorate.

References

- Ekwama, M. B. (2003). Problems Facing the Field of Special Education in Nigeria and the Way Forward. *Journal of Research in Special Education*; 6(1), pp.27-36.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004). *National Policy on Education* (4th ed.) Lagos: NERDC.
- Fisher, D. & Nancy, E. (2001). Access to Core Curriculum: Critical Ingredients for Student Success. *Remedial and Special Education*, 22, 148-157.
- Lere, M.M. & Yakwal, S.M. (2005). State and Future of Legislating for Special Education in Nigeria: Paper Presented at the National Conference of Nigeria Primary and Teacher Education held at Asaba, Delta State. June 13 – 17.
- Mugu, Y. (2010). Curriculum Considerations for Children with Special Needs in Inclusive Education programmes. In S.M. Yakwal & A.E. Ozegya (eds.). Unpublished Resource Manual for Education Secretaries, Heads of School Services and Supervisors.
- Onwubolu, C.O. (2005). The State and Future of Special Education in Delta State. Paper Presented at the Nigerian Primary and Teacher Education Association Conference held at FCE (Technical) Asaba, Delta State, June, 13 – 17.
- Orkwis Raymond (1999). Curriculum Access and Universal Design for Learning. Center for Exceptional children. (Retrieved from http://www.cec.sped.org/AM/Template.cfm?section=Cec_TodayI&TEMPLATE=/CM/CO....)2010
- Ozoji, E.D. (2003). *Special Education for Beginner Professionals* (2nd Edition). Jos: Deka Publishers.
- Ozoji, E.D. (2005). *Re-positioning Special Needs Education for Effective Service Delivery in Nigeria*. A Deka Special Education Monograph Series No. 8, Jos: Deka Publication.
- Rose, D.E. & Meyer, A. (2002). *Teaching Student in the Digital Age: Universal Design for Learning*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- UNESCO (1994). *The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education*. Salamanca Spain: UNESCO.