

# IDENTIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN AN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SETTING

**Awambe, K. Emmanuel**

*Department of Educational Support Services  
Ministry of Education Headquarters, Makurdi, Benue State*

## **Abstract**

*This paper examines the concept and purpose of identification and Assessment of children with disabilities, in an inclusive education setting it also outlines various methods of identification and assessment of children with disabilities, such as Case history, Observation, Rating Scales, Informal and formal methods. Challenges associated with identification and assessment of children with disabilities, in an inclusive education setting, such as, lack of qualified personnel, lack of information, lack of training facilities, lack of funds, lack of support and encouragement, inadequate planning and unfavourable attitudes of the society are highlighted. The prospects of identification and assessment of children with disabilities are presented. Recommendations in terms of training and re-training of qualified personnel, creation of more awareness through workshops'/seminars, involving teachers, parents and special education professionals are advanced as a way forward for identification and assessment programme's of children with disabilities in an inclusive education setting.*

*Key words: identification, assessment, and children with disabilities.*

## **Introduction**

Children with disabilities are those children who find the conventional classroom boring or frustrating because of the difficulties they experience in coping with their colleagues in any given task. They usually perform below average compared to their classmates in academic and other related activities. As state earlier, Regular teachers find it difficult to manage the problems these children encounter in classes. This could be due to their little or no knowledge of this types of children in question. Obani (2006) views that these children could be of average or above average intelligence as measured by intelligence tests. That is to say, some could perform above average or very highly in some school subjects, but who perform very poorly and experience undue difficulties to read or write or spell or in doing simple mathematical operations and calculations, even with good conventional teaching and remedial help. Moreover, children with disabilities cut across the whole universe. There is no nation that would claim that its citizens especially children who do not have one problem or the other in the classroom setting.

Lerner and Kline (2006) postulated that throughout the years, children from all walks of life have experienced serious difficulties in academic work. For example individuals with disabilities encounter different types of problems in learning. One child's obstacle may be in the acquisition of speech and oral language, another may be in reading, mathematics, handwriting, motor skills, written expression, thinking or nonverbal learning among others. For the purpose of this paper, these terms are explained;

**Identification:** is the process of spotting out children who need special attention or special needs education services or other related services. It involves careful observation of the behaviour and characteristics of an individual child.

**Assessment:** The term assessment refers to all activities use to help children with disabilities and to gauge their performances. It is the process of documenting, usually in measurable terms, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs. Assessment can also focus on the individual learner, the learning community (class, workshop, or other organized group of learns) an institution, or educational system as a whole.

**Children with disabilities:** Federal Ministry of Education (FME) (2004) defines children with disabilities as those who require special needs and services in pursuit of their education as a result of their impairments.

**Disabilities:** Is a total lose of a given structures. It is a generic term (broad) describing deviation or a change for the worse in either hearing, visual, mental and learning disorder, or function which is usually outside a normal range.

### **The Concept of Identification**

Identification could be referred to as the process of spotting out children who need special attention or special needs education services or other related services. It involves careful observation of the behavior and characteristics of an individual. Andzayi (2003) opines that it is the process of assessing the behavior of another person, observing, judging certain deficits, or behavior of individual children and adults. It is an act of discovering, locating by specific proof of one's behavior. Disabilities on the other hand is a total lose of a given structures. It is a generic term (broad) describing deviation or a change for the worse in either hearing, visual, mental and learning disorder, or function which is usually outside a normal range.

Identification is the process of spotting out children who need special attention or special education services as earlier defined. Amwe (1990) maintains that it is the process of detecting children that need exceptional services within the population. For any successful identification and assessment to take place, there is need for adequate planning by the identification team. Also, relative instruments, equipment and materials must be provided. It refers to the process of child-find. It implies reaching; out for or assessing children in order to determine whether they are having disabilities or not (Kolo, 1994). It involves screening and diagnosis that are usually used to spot out children who have Deviated characteristics from the accepted standards of normalcy (Odebode, 2000).

## **Purposes of Identification**

The main purposes of identification and assessment of children with disabilities in an inclusive education setting are to determine whether they are eligible for special education services and, if they are eligible, to determine what those services will be. Eligibility for special education services requires two findings: first, the child must meet the criteria for at least one of the thirteen disabilities recognized in the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) or the counterparts thereof in state law, and secondly, special education and/or related services must be required for the children to receive an appropriate education. It is true that some children are eligible for special education and/or related services but do not need them, while other children need the services but are not available.

## **Categories of Children with Disabilities in Inclusive Education Setting**

The World Health Organization (WHO; 1981) defines children with disabilities as those who are restricted or lack ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being of a comparable culture, age and sex. Mba (1995) Heward (2000) and the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) (2004) categorizes children with disabilities as follows:

- a. Those with Learning disabilities
- b. The Hearing impaired
- c. Those with intellectual retardation or Mentally retarded
- d. The Emotional and behavioural disorders
- e. Those with Speech or communication disorders
- f. Those with Visual impairment
- g. The physically and health impairment
- h. The gifted and talented

This categories of children listed above cannot cope with regular school programmes. Thus requires various methods of identifications and assessment for proper placement for their educational options.

## **Methods of Identification of Children with Disabilities in an Inclusive Education setting**

### **1. Formal Method**

It's a standardize method of identifying children with disabilities. The procedure is based on administering a test amongst children of the some age or level. Normally, the construction of such tests is done by experts bearing in mind a particular group of children under study. They are commercially prepared instruments that have been formed or standardized on large groups of children. They require strict procedures in administration, scoring, and interpretation. The tests designed are called norm-referenced because their scores are derived from their administration to a large group of children (Lerner, 1997). The resulting scores are the norms from which youngsters being assessed

are compared. The tests scores are often being reported in terms of grade level (Lovitt, 1989). When results of these tests are gathered, they are analysed and interpreted. The interpretation of the tests administered would give an insight of children with disabilities that may need special needs education intervention and other related services.

## **2. Informal Methods**

This refers to the ways a teacher uses to identify children with disabilities in an inclusive education setting. There are teacher - made materials that are used to spot out these types of children in class. Identification of these children is done through activities that take place in an inclusive education setting. Andzayi (1992) viewed information procedure as everything the teacher does in order to find out what to teach the child, how to teach the child and under what conditions the child can learn best. In the informal approach the teacher requires to perform the following activities:

- a. Observes the child in the class and outside the class;
- b. Looks through the child's exercise books and previous tests and reports;
- c. Visits a child's home;

Prepares special test for the child in various skills areas such as; motor, reading, perceptual, language, behavioural, social, and mathematic skills.

## **Steps for Identification of Children with Disabilities in an Inclusive Education Setting**

The approach in identifying each of this type of children depends on the effectiveness of employing any of these steps.

### **1. Case History**

In this method, information obtained give insights and clues about the children's background and development from parents. During interview, parents share information about their children's prenatal history, birth conditions and neonatal development, the age of developmental milestone (e.g sitting, working, toilet training and talking), and learning problems of other members of the family. The children's school history can be obtained from parents, school records and school personnel (teachers, nurses and guidance Counselors and so on). This information is normally gathered from parents of these children (Lerner, 1997).

### **2. Observation**

This could be referred to as "clinical observation". The teacher watches the child on one to one basis. A close watch of what the child does in class would help to pin point exactly what he or she can and cannot do. In a typical inclusive classroom setting, a teacher is not supposed to look at children as a whole but individually. Lerner (1997) submitted that one could observe quite a lot by watching. A skillful observer can often detect important characteristics and behaviour of the child in an inclusive education setting. For instance, he or she can note whether the child is attending to the lesson or engage in other activities. It sheds more light on children's personal adjustment. It is believed that

observation of every day classroom behaviour provides much authentic information especially, on children that needed special attention. In the word of Houck (1984), teachers working with a total class could quickly identify children who fail to routinely have difficulty in comparison to their peers or those who demonstrate behaviour with development expectations.

### 3. Rating Scales Approach

The rating scale technique is designed to gather information about a child's behavioural skills. There are children who find it difficult to cope with academic activities due to their behavioural traits or whose behaviours interfere with their academic performance. Lerner (1997) was of the view that behaviour rating scale requires teacher or parents to record their observations and impressions of children in measurable fashions. That teachers judgment of children with disabilities which rating helps in this process. Researches have shown that rating scales are frequently completed by teachers and parents in assessing- "Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD)".

Lerner (1997) maintained that informal methods are useful and practical alternative of identification procedures that test children .on the ordinary materials and activities they are currently working with in the classroom. The procedure derives home the expected behaviours of these children in class.

### Assessment of Children with Disabilities in an inclusive education setting

The term assessment refers to all activities use to help children with disabilities and to gauge their performances. It is the process of documenting, usually in measurable terms, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs. Assessment can also focus on the individual learner, the learning community (class, workshop, or other organized group of learns) an institution, or educational system as a whole. (Barbara 2012). In other words, assessment is a process of observing a sample of children's behaviour and drawing inferences about their knowledge and abilities.

### Concepts of Assessment

Assessment concepts is viewed in three levels; Brooks-Gunn and Lweis (1983) opines the following levels of assessment, each of which requires different strategies:

- i) **The primary level:** This involves the initial assessment of whether or not a child might be at risk, with the function of dividing children into two categories, which minimizes false results.
- ii) **The secondary level:** This is a diagnostic level in which all suspected children are assessed using complex procedure designed to explore the extent of specific disabilities involved in the child's dysfunctional and possible remediation programmes.
- iii) **The treatment level:** In this level, specific information on dysfunction is collected for purposes of remediation, curricula planning and programme placement.

## **Purpose of Assessment**

A good comprehensive assessment programme should test all major developmental areas such as speech, and language development, concepts, skills, gross motor development, social and self-skills (Allen, 1980) in line with the above, the purpose of assessment is to establish baseline from which individual child's growth can be measured. It should also be formative which aims at providing feedback on a child's work. This takes the form of diagnostic, standardized tests, developed by experts.

## **Methods of Assessment in an Inclusive Education Setting**

There are various methods of assessments. For the purpose of this paper, the following methods will be discussed.

- i. Formal assessment method
- ii. Informal assessment method

**Formal method:** The formal assessment method usually implies a written document, such as test, or quiz. A formal assessment gives a numerical score or grade based on children's performance.

**Informal Method:** This occurs in a more casual manner, and may include observation inventories, checklists, rating scales, participation, peers, self-evaluation and discussions.

## **Challenges Facing the Identification and Assessment of Children with Disabilities in an Inclusive Education Setting**

Challenges that hinder the efforts by professionals for identification and assessment of children with disabilities are as follows:

**Funding:** Involves the process of sourcing, allocating and managing the revenues for the identification and assessment programmes. It is crucial because it helps in determining both human and non-human resources required as inputs in the identification and assessment programmes.

**Political disenfranchisement of the citizenry:** Nigerian democracy is characterized by ethnic and political contractors who invest heavily in politics in the hope of reaping bountifully from it, with the hope of dictating government plans. Therefore contracts are poorly awarded and poorly executed and in most cases abandoned.

**Inadequate Consultation:** Each leader that takes over, for example commissioner or minister from his predecessor sometimes enunciates a policy overnight without consultation.

**Lack of planning and monitoring:** Nigerian educational system is often experimental based for example educational reforms are usually caught up with inadequate implementation of policies.

**Lack of Sincerity:** genuine commitment and determination as well as political will by the leadership to the development of special education as each leadership come with its own agenda and inflexibility and resistance to change in preference to holding onto old order.

**Lack of support and encouragement:** Parents are usually left out in the programme of identification and assessment because their roles are not defined.

Other challenges includes: lack of qualified personnel, lack of information, lack of facilities and resources, limited resources and unfavourable attitudes of the society, lack of adequate planning and monitoring etc.

### **Facilitating Identification and Assessment of Children with Disabilities in an Inclusive Education Setting**

The following suggestions will contribute to effective processes for identifying and assessing children with disabilities.

Set up a child's Support Team to respond to teachers' concerns about children.

- The team could promote professional development to increase teachers' awareness of indicators across the school years. Remember, there may be many reasons for children difficulties and they need to be explored carefully.
- The team could develop classroom assessment practices to identify when children are not making progress toward curriculum expectations.
- The team could develop efficient pre-referral steps that draw on expertise at the school level to assist with problem solving, and provide, suggestions for understanding and addressing the needs of children.
- The team could encourage the involvement of parents early in the planning process. If parents have meaningful involvement, they will know action is being taken.
- The team could promote collaboration to maximize flexibility in organizing for instruction so that additional assistance is provided to children encountering difficulties.
- The team could implement preliminary interventions monitor their success and hold follow-up meetings to review children progress.
- The team could arrange for the involvement of professionals with expertise in the problem – solving process before obtaining referrals for specialized assessment. For example, a psychologist or speech-language pathologist could participate in brainstorming preliminary intervention strategies. Access to such professionals varies and children Support Teams are organized flexibly.
- The team could arrange for appropriate referrals to other professionals for further specialized assessment and possible diagnosis of children with disabilities.

Organize an assessment process that encompasses multiple sources of information and a team approach.

- Because no single method of assessment will provide educators with “the answer”. However, strong support exists for an assessment approach that encompasses multiple sources of formal and informal assessment information.
- A team approach is most effective the diagnosis of a disability is made by a qualified professional on the basis of multiple sources of information. The information from the classroom (particularly with regard to the child’s response to various interventions), the parents’ input, the child’s input, and data from various methods of informal, formal and specialized assessment contribute to the identification and assessment of children with disabilities. These multiple sources of assessment information guide programme planning for the children.

### **Prospects for Identification and Assessment of Children with Disabilities in Nigeria**

The future of providing human and other resources for identification and assessment of children with disabilities in an inclusive education setting in Nigeria is encouraging because of the following reasons:

The public is more aware of the services and programmes for identification and assessment of children with disabilities. For example, there is an increase in the number of appropriate facilities for training persons for identification and assessment programmes. The federal, state and local governments now make funds for the provision of facilities for identification and assessment of children with disabilities in special and professional organizations hospitals and clinic across the country.

There are more advocacy services now than before with regards to identification and assessment of children with disabilities many professional associations advocate for identification and assessment services. For example, The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), Child Right National Association Persons with disabilities, Abuja, National Teachers Institute.

There is an increase in the number of appropriate facilities for identification and assessment of children with disabilities in Nigeria. For example, many Nigerian universities have facilities for identification and assessment of children with disabilities i.e. University of Nigeria, University of Ibandon, Bayero University, Kano, University of Calabar just to mention a few.

The Universal Basic Education Programme and Inclusive education are all directed to make provision for identification and assessment of children with disabilities.

All these are indicators that the prospects of identification and assessment of children with abilities in Nigeria is bright. There seems to be an emergence of increased cooperative practices between professionals and parents which has enhanced the identification and assessment programmes in Nigeria today.



## **Recommendations**

In the light of the various methods of identification and assessment of children with disabilities, in an inclusive education setting and the challenges and prospect earlier discussed in this paper, the writer wish to make the following recommendations;

- Early identification and assessment of children with disabilities in an inclusive education setting should begin at the pre-school level this is important because a census of these children will help determined the type of facilities and educational options available to them.
- Teachers in regular schools should be skilled in the identification of children with disabilities. Specialists in special education should be employed in regular schools to facilitate the identification and assessment of children with disabilities in an inclusive education setting.
- In-service training should be organized for regular school teachers in order to widen their knowledge in the identification and assessment of children with disabilities.
- Government should provide enough equipment in schools in order to assist in the identification and assessment of these children.
- That the identification and assessment programmes for the children with disabilities should be given adequate attention by the federal, states and local governments, by way of funding.
- Training and re-training programmes for teachers and professionals such as audiologists/speech pathologists among others, for identifications and assessment of children with disabilities should be encouraged.
- Workshop/seminars involving teachers, parents and others special education professionals should be regularly organize by Federal, States and Local Governments for identifications and assessment of children with disabilities.

## **Conclusion**

The identification and assessment of children with disabilities in an inclusive education setting should be a matter of urgency in the educational system of this country. Those involved should be up and doing in spotting out these children in schools, the identification and assessment of children's special needs should be a team work. Classroom teachers should be skilled in the identification and assessment of children with disabilities. It's necessary because the sooner they are identified and given the special assistance they need, the greater are their chances to succeed in school.

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