

EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR ACCOMMODATION AND EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Inclusive education is the latest aphorism for an all-embracing education for the disabled and their non-disabled peers in a regular classroom. The philosophy and gains of inclusive education are lofty, ideal and laudable, because it would enhance the attainment of the objectives of Education-For-All goals, as education cannot be for all until it is received by all. A system that excludes some people cannot be for all and should therefore give way to one that is accommodating of all. This paper thus makes conceptual clarifications of inclusive education and its prospects in Nigeria educational system. It also evaluates Nigeria's National Policy on Education on inclusive education and discusses implications of inclusive education for educational achievement. It concludes that political will, adequate funding and people's commitment to inclusive education are critical to its full integration into the Nigeria educational system, and effective management towards the achievement of its objectives.

Introduction

Education has long been identified as a major vehicle for political, economic and societal advancement. To this extent, governments of the countries of the world desire education for their subjects. It is equally important to note that the whole world has embraced education as a veritable tool for total developments persons and the society, and thus the need for Inclusive education. Inclusive education, in the words of Ajuwon (2012), is a process of enhancing the capacity of the education system in any country to reach out to diverse learners. The basis of inclusion is that special needs pupils have a right to the benefits of a full school experience, with needed modifications and supports, alongside their peers without disabilities who receive general education.

National Policy on Education (2004) states the concept of inclusive education within the broader Universal Basic Education scheme. Consequently, some advocates now see inclusive education as a favoured approach to responding to the needs of all students in ordinary schools. Thus, as inclusion of students with disabilities into regular classrooms becomes a reality within public schools in Nigeria, it becomes imperative to determine the perceptions of special educators toward this practice. In both low and high-income countries, proponents of the policy of inclusive education are now reaffirming

their commitment to education for all and acknowledging the urgency of providing education for their marginalized citizens.

Conceptual Clarifications of *Inclusive Education*

Inclusive education implies that all students in a school, regardless of their strengths or weaknesses in any area become part of the school community. They are included in the feeling of belonging among other students, teachers and support staff (Huston, 2007). Precisely, Inclusive Education (IE) implies that all children with special needs should be included in the traditional classroom to study with their non-disabled peers. Lipsky and Gartner (1999) describe inclusive education as students with disabilities having full membership in age-appropriate classes in their neighbourhood schools, with appropriate supplementary aids and support services.

Objectives of Inclusive education, according to Okorosaye-Orubite and Maigida (2008), include among others:

- Giving priority to meeting the needs of children with disabilities.
- Promoting awareness in communities for inclusive education of children with disabilities.
- Extending the provision of services and facilities for gaining access to education by children with disabilities.
- Ensuring that government and non-government initiatives recognize children training on disability;
- Ensuring that everyone in the school system have a sense of belonging and thus be accepted and supported by others;
- Ensuring that there is no segregation of any type, as all children should be encouraged to participate in all indoor and outdoor curricular activities;

Prospects of Inclusion in Nigeria Educational System

Okorosaye-Orubite and Maigida (2008) state that for the inclusive students, the benefits are enormous as instructional time with peers without need helps the learner to learn the strategies taught by the teachers. The teachers bring in different ways to teach lesson for special needs students and peers without need, and all students would potentially benefit from this. Equally so, students learn from the lesson how to help one another. Similarly, socialization develops and allows students to learn communication skills from one another, thereby building friendships from this interaction. Also, students can learn about hobbies from one another. The friendship in school is important for the development of learning. Basically, involving peers without needs with special needs peers gives the students a positive attitude towards one another, even after school.

Inclusion as a strategy to include the excluded groups in educational programme holds a lot of prospects for Nigeria educational system, which according to Ganiyu (2003), includes:

- It enhances the attainment of the objectives of Education-For-All goals. Education cannot be for all until it is received by all. A system that excludes some people cannot be for all and should therefore give way to one that is accommodating of all.
- It promotes a sense of cooperation and the feeling of togetherness in the learners.
- It promotes favourable competition among school children of different abilities, endowments and backgrounds.
- In addition to its direct benefit on learners with special needs, it allows for the resources of special education teachers to be tapped to the fullest, since they could be used as regular school teachers. It should be noted here, that special education teachers have the unique ability to teach in both the special and regular schools.
- It provides a means of building a cooperative school community, where all are accommodated and able to participate.
- It is cost effective, as all the learners are accommodated in the same environment using virtually the same facilities. Unnecessary duplications of cost that are associated with segregated arrangements are thus avoided.

However, to effectively capture these prospects, the following steps, according to Amakievi (2013), should be strongly considered:

- ✓ Hold a stakeholder forum for Inclusive Education review, awareness creation and implementation;
- ✓ establish collaborative funding, maintenance and sustenance of all resources needed;
- ✓ explore and establish networks on Inclusive Education for enhancing quality inclusive education; and,
- ✓ establishment of monitoring mechanism for proper implementation of Inclusive Education.

Evaluation of Nigeria’s National Policy on Education on Inclusive Education

Since the launching of the first National Policy on Education in 1977, there has been a plethora of activities aimed at improving special education services for children, including the establishment of additional residential primary schools for children with disabilities in most states of the federation, the increased attendance of students with disabilities in secondary and higher institutions, and the preparation of special education teachers in selected tertiary institutions in the country. There has also been a rise in the number of advocacy organizations of and for people with disabilities (Ajuwon, 2008).

Section 7 of the revised National Policy on Education (2004) explicitly recognizes that children and youth with special needs shall be provided with inclusive education services. The commitment is made to equalize educational opportunities for all children, irrespective of their physical, sensory, mental, psychological or emotional

disabilities. Undoubtedly, these are lofty goals intended to improve the quality of special education services, but much more is needed to translate the goals into concrete action.

In response to the needed reform in the education sector, Nigeria launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme in 1999. In 2004, the Federal Government enacted the Universal Basic Education Law in which it makes a provision of 2% of its Consolidated Revenue Fund (CRF) to finance the UBE programme. Thus, the compulsory free Universal Basic Education Act, 2004, provides a legal framework within which the Federal Government supports states towards achieving uninterrupted nine-year compulsory Universal Basic Education for all children in primary and junior secondary school levels throughout the country. The goals in the UBE scheme indicate that children and youth in general have every right to an education that will inculcate in them the requisite knowledge and survival skills in the society. More fundamentally, it must be recognized that the task of including the needs of students with disabilities, and those of their families, in any national policy on education is important and carries lifelong implications.

The basic aims of special education as stated in the National Policy on Education (2004) are:

- ✓ to give a concrete meaning to the idea of equalising educational opportunities for all children; their physical, mental and emotional disabilities notwithstanding;
- ✓ to provide adequate education for all handicapped children and adults, in order that they may play their roles fully in contributing to the development of the nation; and,
- ✓ to provide opportunities for exceptionally gifted children to develop their skills at their own pace, in the interest of the nation's economic and technological development .

Implications of Inclusive Education for Educational Achievement

Advocacy for inclusive education revolves around some basic arguments and thus the need for its effective management. Firstly, several writers claim that inclusive education is a basic human right. For example, Lipsky and Gartner (1999) assert that inclusive education is a fundamental right, derived from the principle of equity, which, if recognized, would contribute significantly to a democratic society. This is also emphasized by Slee (2001), that inclusive education is about the cultural politics of protecting the rights of citizenship for all students.

Lipsky and Gartner (1999) assert that in designing educational programmes for students with disabilities, the focus must shift from the individual's impairments to the social context, a key feature of which should be a unitary education system dedicated to providing quality education for all students. Skidmore (2002) opines that children have the right to be educated in regular schools with their non-disabled peers. Inclusive education recognizes that all children are different and they all learn at different paces. Schools and teachers need to adapt and change to accommodate all children with

different learning needs. Inclusive education can overcome discriminatory attitudes and increase acceptance of diversity in a society. Furthermore, the development of inclusive education is the best option for achieving education for all in Nigeria where there are serious resource constraints. It is not financially viable to build segregated special schools in locations that may serve a just few children with disabilities. Segregated special schools are often far from the homes of disabled children, requiring them to leave their families and communities to pursue their education. At residential schools, disabled children are vulnerable to neglect, and physical and sexual abuse. When this takes place in such isolated institutions, children have no one to turn to for help. All these have implications on Nigeria educational system and thus the need to effectively manage the concept to enhance effective educational delivery.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Presently in Nigeria, inclusion still remains in the realm of theory and far from effective practice. Special needs education in Nigeria is still grappling with problems of policy implementation, an environment that is not conducive for practice and a lackadaisical attitude of the people and government. Full implementation of inclusion in such an environment may be unrealistic and counterproductive.

It is thus recommended public enlightenment work must begin the process of educating the general community in order to eradicate superstitions about causation of disabilities, and to modify the fears and myths about children with disabilities that create misunderstanding and inhibit normal interaction. In the process of changing attitudes, successful and well-placed persons with disabilities in the society should be used as agent of attitudinal change.

Education should be seen by the government as a basic human right and the foundation for a just and equal society. This implies adequate funding to meet the target goals and objectives for equalizing learning for all pupils, including those with disabilities in our public schools.

Adequate facilities should be provided in the classrooms to accommodate students, irrespective of their unique situation, and conveniences in the schools (toilets, play grounds, theatres, etc) should be made to suit all categories of students in the school.

Since education of children with disabilities requires comprehensive and strategic involvement and coordination among ministries, departments, NGOs and others catering to disability, an inter-agency coordination structure should be developed to facilitate responses to the special needs of children with disabilities.

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