

# THE ROLE OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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## **Abstract**

*Traditionally, Nigerians handicapped children have been maltreated and subordinated in our history and made to believe that they are the cause of their problems, they are even blamed for their conditions. These handicapped children, have been discriminated against, rejected, made to suffer untold hardship and sometimes abandoned to die. Therefore, the need for inclusive education, to enable them be useful to themselves, their communities and contribute to National Development. The writer discusses the concept of education, concept of inclusive education, reasons for inclusive education, the need for equal educational opportunities, advantages for inclusive education, and constraints for inclusive education. Finally, the writer contends that inclusive education is the right way forward and implores Nigerian government and educators to help our nation shatter pervasive stereotypes about handicapped children to enable them contribute meaningfully towards development of our Nation. Concrete and useful suggestions were made.*

## **Introduction**

Contrary to the myth that disabled or handicapped children are evil and responsible for their problems and cannot learn or be useful to themselves and society, there has been evidence worldwide, that these disabled and handicapped children can learn and are learning. According to Gentry and Jones (1972), these children can, do, will and are learning.

The myth that the disabled and handicapped children are responsible for their conditions is in fact, to say the least misleading. It is this assumption that led to ill-treatment and abandonment of these unfortunate Nigerian children. Thank God, today things are changing for good, as disabled and handicapped children are being accepted by Nigerians, as fellow human beings. Hopefully, inclusive education will clear the environment of previous prejudice against disabled children, create room for integration and friendship, which will make the disabled children see themselves as useful independent citizens, who will play their roles in the development of the nation.

## **Concept of Education**

Generally education is a basic requirement and necessity for all members of any society. Education is in fact, sociological and a sort of catalyst or modification of

behaviour in achieving satisfactory life adjustment. Educators believe that education is only thing that can change anything. Education as a matter of fact, improves income and reduces poverty. Generally, literacy has been found to be a real tool for poverty reduction while illiteracy is connected with poverty and underdevelopment.

According to Adewole (2000, P.4) “The vicious circle constituted by underdevelopment can be brought to life when we relate illiteracy to other problems of development”. This is because most Nigerians are poor today, for being illiterates. They are hungry and disease-ridden because they lack education. Therefore, basic education for every Nigerian in line with National Policy on Education, remains an important recipe for national development and transformation.

### **Concept of Inclusive Education**

This is total integration, mainstreaming, desegregation. It is in fact the system that brings together all children in the same regular classroom for teaching and learning. Okyere and Adams (2003) noted that some professionals see inclusive education as placing all students with disabilities full-time into regular classrooms. Oriade (2009) defined inclusive education as an education for the disabled with the regular classroom environment. Shikden (2009) sees inclusive education as a system of education that accommodates all children, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions to learn in the same classroom with other non-handicapped children. These definitions are in line with National Policy on Education (2004) which states that all Nigerian children should have equal educational opportunity with no discrimination.

### **Reasons for Inclusive Education**

Inclusive education is a great equalizer. This is major reason for National Policy on Education (2004) which clearly states that Nigerian children should have equal educational opportunities with no discrimination whatsoever. Inclusive education is therefore, in line with this provision and must be supported and be made to work as it has worked in developed countries, like in USA and Britain, where inclusive education has carried all children along, regardless of disability.

This is important as these children are part of our society, they must learn together in the same classroom with ‘normal’ children. That way they learn from each other, become useful to themselves and communities and contribute to the national development. Educators favour inclusive education and Nigerian government supported it. As Dakun (1995, p. 93) indicates that the government favours integration as the most realistic form of special education. This is why inclusive education has been gaining grounds worldwide, and has been found to be the most effective means of gaining equality.

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## **The Need for Equal Educational Opportunity**

Educators and parents of handicapped children are doing everything possible to create hope for these children. Their parents want for their children whatever other parents want for their own children. The parents of these unfortunate children are battling everyday for better opportunity for their children through whatever available means. If today, equality of opportunity is viable, our schools would produce substantially equal results for all our children, handicapped children inclusive. This is why Oriade (2009) explains that there is peaceful co-existence as both special needs and normal children are in the same school and do the same work/duties assigned to them together regardless of their conditions. This is true because these children can learn from each other. In that case, everybody stands to gain, the individuals, communities and society at large. The simple fact about inclusive education is that it can work, teacher can teach handicapped and non-handicapped children together in one classroom.

This is possible and can succeed because it is succeeding today in other countries and can also succeed here in our country, if given a chance. This is why Ozoji (2005) insists that government documents should spell out the objectives, mode of implementation and monitoring of individual student progress, resource allocation, funding and how it is to be included into the school system, for successful implementation of inclusive education.

This will not only mean an end to leaving a lot of children out of school, but an end to segregation and promotion of equality education and indeed truly inclusive educational system that would mean an end to isolation of children with special needs.

## **Constraints of Inclusive Education**

Generally, Nigerians find it very difficult recognizing handicapped children as their fellow human beings. As observed by Onwuegbu (1985) in Dakun (1995) who acknowledges that the most important aspect of special education, is the recognition that an individual as a human being has strengths and special needs. Teachers of inclusive education must be trained to help the handicapped children overcome their needs.

Government on their part, must avoid the usual problems of inadequacies of human and material resources due to inadequate funding, as money has always been a big issue in Nigeria, as both education and social programmes compete for fund. Bulus (2009) states that education competes with other social sectors for funds. Even when the fund is available, much goes for overheads, leaving little for infrastructural costs. This is why many handicapped children are still suffering the most pressing challenge of population presently under-served, through special education. Okoli (2011) advised teachers of inclusive education to ensure that no child is left behind.

## **Advantages of Inclusive Education**

For the fact that Nigerian government and educators have viewed inclusive education as the most effective means of gaining equality is a very positive development.

Most Nigerian educators and supporters of inclusive education, now believe that effectiveness of inclusive education would rapidly increase when fully implemented and all segregated schools eliminated. This will mean an end to segregation and promotion of equality education and indeed truly inclusive educational system that would mean an end or at least beginning to an end to isolation of handicapped children in Nigeria.

Other advantages are peaceful co-existence of both handicapped and normal children. These handicapped children will now have equal educational opportunity, with no discrimination at all. They will feel independent and could contribute to nation's building.

### **Way Forward**

Inclusive Education has succeeded in so many countries of the world, there is no reason for not succeeding here at home. As long as, the government ensures reasonable funding to tackle school structures, curriculum, teachers, equipments etc, all are catalysts for progress and change. Inclusive education can play a crucial role in our nation building, if effectively implemented. For a successful implementation, there is need for supportive environment, well motivated teachers, positive attitude to parents and children to help inclusive education succeed. Ozoji (2009) lamented that some aspects of the curriculum are not implemented either because of incompetence of teachers or absence of the enabling assistive technologies or both. As a matter of fact, it is the creativity, imagination and commitment of special education teachers that can determine the success or failure of inclusive education towards our nation's building. This is why Dante (1973, p. 3) argues that unless classroom teachers change their attitudes, behaviour and strategies, education programmes will have little impact. Teaching, especially in inclusive education, can be very demanding and often frustrating experience. These frustrations may be beyond control of teachers, as they in most cases lack basic teaching materials for inclusive education to succeed.

### **Conclusion**

Obviously, with favourable learning environment, inclusive education is achievable and can be the most effective means for gainful equality and access and more likely to make discrimination and prejudice reduced. This hopefully will end segregation and lead to promotion of quality education, friendship, respect and understanding among all people, especially between the normal and disabled children, this will make our schools, environmental friendly and inclusive education a gateway to individual, community and national development.

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