

THE RELEVANCE OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN: RE-AWAKENING OF STAKEHOLDER'S CONSCIOUSNESS

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Abstract

The relevance of inclusive education, the role of stakeholders and its delivery to a noble child with special needs is a very obvious tasks. It is widely held view that organized inclusive education is yet the greatest and most potent power man has discovered and developed for the educational development and progress for children with special needs. Specialized education is little developed and inclusive education is a system of education whereby children with special needs receive their education at school in mainstream classes. It is however expected that all stakeholders this time around be committed to the full implementation of inclusive education policies and programmes by the target year 2015.

Introduction

The term inclusive education has become synonymous with special education, but a review the world situation, suggests that the definition of inclusive education must be broaden to address not only the needs of those who fall within the different classifications of children with special educational needs but also those who are disenfranchised for any reason.

Osuorji, (2011) defines "Inclusive education as a system whereby children with special needs receive their education at a school in mainstream classes.

Inclusive education is a child-focused approach to education that takes into account children's abilities, potentials and diverse needs. Inclusive education programmes must be addressed to meet the special educational needs of children with disabilities in the regular classroom settings. This approach to education calls for all stakeholders to develop creative strategies that cater to the needs of children with special needs.

Who Then Are Special Needs Children?

The National Policy on Education (2004) refers to handicapped (people with special needs) as an individual who is unable to cope with normal school classroom organization and methods in the sense that such individuals have learning difficulties. The policy statement on education further attempts to identify various handicapping conditions such as, visually impaired, hearing impaired, mentally retarded, learning disabled, gifted and talented, emotionally disturbed, socially maladjustment, physically handicapped to mention a few.

Again, children with special needs are categories of people that have problem of coping with learning in a normal class. They are exceptional children who for a variety of reasons are not able to function at the level of majority in the society.

Inclusive education is holistic to teaching and learning. For inclusive education to be successful and sustainable, it must be address by all stakeholders.

Garuba, (2010) listed stakeholders which includes:

Federal Ministry of Education, University Basic Education Commission, State Ministry of education, State Universal Basic Education Board, Special Educators, The Schools, The Universities, The Communities, The Parents, The children with special needs, The relevant NGOs, The professional bodies, he further stated that each of the stakeholders have specific roles to play in ensuring that inclusion becomes real and is implemented to success.

Relevance of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is practice teaching children in regular classrooms with non-handicapped children to the fullest extent possible; such children may have orthopaedic, intellectual, emotional, visual difficulties or handicaps associated with hearing. Inclusive education has been of increasing interest in the past decades. Research showing that many handicapped students learns better in regular than in special classes; racial imbalance existed in special education classes. The Civil Right Movement stressed on the right of individual. The Federal Education for all Handicapped Children Act (1975) stated that;

All handicapped children are entitled to a free and appropriate education in the "Least restrictive environment"

has been widely interpreted as supporting the expansion of inclusive education. Inclusive education has worked well with those segments of special student populations whose disabilities are compatible with a classroom setting and is felt in general to better prepare special students socially for life after school. It has also helped other school children to gain a greater understanding of those with disabilities.

Goals of Inclusive Education

Ozaji, (2010) listed the following goals:

- To provide education for children with diverse learning needs.
- To make special needs children active member of school community and then make them achieve social competence.
- To build a supportive school community that is able to identify and minimize barriers to learning and participation.
- To educate more children better.
- To ensure successful learning and social experience.
- To empower children who are hitherto excluded and isolated.

- To enable students to participate in mainstream education to the best of their abilities.
- To build inclusive schools that can respond to diverse needs.
- To study pressures that lead some people in school feel excluded and separated.
- To attend imaginatively to diverse learning needs in the classroom.
- To ensure improvement of student learning outcomes.
- To develop exemplar unit planning for diversity and understanding this diversity.

Re-Awakening the Stakeholders

The stakeholders are those who have the responsibility and interest in the implementation of inclusive education at different levels. For any country where policies on inclusive education is new like Nigeria or country who have not yet been fully developed, it is very important to involve relevant stakeholders.

The Government/Ministry of Education as Stakeholders

Government as an administrator and policy maker provide the impetus and support to make inclusive education work.

Lere, (2009), stated that, it is expected that Ministries of Education at all levels be committed to the full implementation of inclusive education by the target year 2015. These policies should be implemented for the benefits of all children.

Kyauta, (2013) listed the following roles

- ❖ Set vision and agenda
- ❖ Enacting a law to embark the policy
- ❖ Employment of teachers and supporting staff
- ❖ Restricting and organization of inclusive education programme.
- ❖ Provision of instructional materials.
- ❖ Organizing in-service/workshop for teachers.
- ❖ Programme assessment and evaluation.

The Teacher as a Stakeholder

Teacher should know that children learn substantially by imitating both their parents and teachers. Teachers should know the individual needs of his children. The language teacher use, his mode of dressing, what he eat and drink, his casual discussions and how he relate to the child and others in the society have either positive or negative effects on the physical, emotional, moral, psychological and mental development. Children learn from known to unknown, simple to complex, concrete to abstract, general to specific and practical to theoretical.

Teachers' Role

- ❖ Participation in curriculum planning and development.

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- ❖ Engages in teaching and learning process.
 - ❖ Supply of necessary information to education authorities and parents.
 - ❖ Participation in the monitoring, assessment and evaluation of inclusive education.

The Parents as a Stakeholder

Parents should be involved in all aspect of learning of their exceptional children. The family is the first source of education for a child, and most learning occurs at home. Parents are the most important stakeholders in any inclusive education settings. They have sole responsibility of ensuring that their children/wards attend and complete school as expected. Parents should make sure they send their children with disabilities to school. Parents are most often responsible for the upkeep of their children. Parents need to be involved in decisions that affecting their children in inclusive education settings, parents should therefore give adequate care, love, warmth and protection to their children with special needs.

Parents' Role

- ❖ They provide information regarding the case history of their exceptional children to the relevant authority.
- ❖ They participate in the planning of education of their children.
- ❖ They give moral support by sending their children to school.
- ❖ They participate in monitoring, assessment and evaluation of progress of their children.

The Community as a Stakeholder

The involvement of the local communities is vital in achieving qualitative education for all. The community plays an active role in promoting inclusive education.

Professional Bodies as a Stakeholder

Inclusive education involves the participation and support of professional bodies such as Nigerian Association of Special Education Teachers (NASSET), National Centre for Exceptional Children (NCEC) and Inclusive Development Foundation (IDF) has always promoted inclusive education.

Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs)

The role non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) plays in education of children with special needs cannot be over-emphasized. NGOs are often good at bringing help and support for people with special needs.

Non-Governmental Organizations such as UNESCO, UNICEF, Lilian Fonds, Christofel Blinded Mission (CBM), Minonite Central Committee (MCC), World Bank and other bodies such as MTN Foundation, Globalcom and Rotary Club International generally supply special equipment to schools and they collaborate with Ministries and

government agencies and encourages inclusive education. They train and retraining of staff for inclusive education.

The Beneficiary – The Child or Learner

The child is the central focal point in any educational set-up especially in the inclusive education.

The Salamanca’s statement on the equalization of opportunities states that;

the education of special needs children should be an integral part of education system of any nation.

It is however sad to note that in most cases disabled people are not often involved in the affairs of the country. Hence, all stakeholders in the field of inclusive education should educate them. The special need children are worse affected looking at the societal attitudes towards them. There is an urgent need for a change of negative as disability is not a respecter of any body.

Conclusion

All over the world there is a new trend toward development of inclusive education because of its relevance for the total educational development of children with special needs. Inclusive education is targeted at children with disabilities. Hence, concerted efforts are required by every stakeholder to support and see the effective implementation of inclusive education in our country Nigeria.

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