

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: THE WAY FORWARD

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Abstract

Inclusion purports that are students with special needs can be active, valued, fully participating members of a school community in which diversity is viewed as the norm and high quality education is provided through a combination of meaningful curriculum, effective teaching and necessary supports. This paper, attempts to examine the concept of inclusive education; the beneficiaries of inclusive education essential features of inclusive education and it also highlights on the issue of inclusive education today and the way forward.

Introduction

Currently, the terms inclusion and responsible inclusion are used to identify the movement to provide service to students with the disabilities in general education settings service for students with disabilities evolve in three distinct phase: relative isolation integration (or mainstreaming), and inclusion. In the relative isolation phase, students were either denied access to public schools or permitted to attend in isolated settings, in integration phase, which began in the 1970s, students with disabilities were mainstreamed, or integrated, into general education programs when this was deemed appropriate, the inclusion phase, starting in the mid-1980s, emphasized that students with disabilities should be fully included in school programs and activities. This phase differed from the integration phase in a minor but very significant way, in the inclusion phase, it was assumed that these students with disabilities are eligible for public education; therefore, this paper attempts to examine the concept of inclusive education; the beneficiaries of inclusive education; essential features of inclusive education; inclusive education today and the way forward

The concept of inclusive

The concept of inclusion has a values orientation, “based on the premise that all individuals with disabilities have a right to be included in naturally occurring settings and activities with their neighborhood press siblings, and fiends” (Erwin, 1993, p.1). Smith (1995), states that inclusion means (1) that every child should be included in a regular class room to the optimum extent appropriate to the needs of that child while preserving the placements and services that special education can provide; (2) that the education of children with disabilities is viewed by all educators as a charred responsibility and privilege; (3) that there is a commitment to include students with

disabilities every facet of school; (4) that every child must have a place and be welcome in a regular class room.

Inclusive education, therefore, means more than simply placing students with disabilities in regular education classrooms it means giving students with disability the opportunity to participate as members in all school activities and affirming their right to such opportunity.

The beneficiary of inclusive education

Special needs children are considered to be the beneficiaries of inclusive education, these includes those formally classified as having disabilities ad defined by the individual with disabilities education Act (IDEA). Students with special needs are defined as those who exhibit one of several specific conditions that result in their need for special education and related service. However many of these students are still considered to have disability under section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and are therefore eligible for certain service and protection (Smith & Patton, 1998).

Some of the special needs students include the following:

Specific learning disabilities, Speech or Language Impairments, Mental Retardation, Emotional disturbances, Physical and other health impairments, Multiple disabilities, Hearing impairments, Orthopedic impairments, Visual impairment, Behaviour and emotional disabilities, Autism, Traumatic brain injury, Deaf-blindness, Developmental delay, Gifted and talented.

Essential features for successful inclusion

Essential features that characterize successful inclusive education for students with special needs in regular classroom system are found to be very effective, when in place, they make the regular education classroom. The best possible option for students with special needs.

These features are:-

- (1) Sense of community and social acceptance
- (2) Attention to curricular needs
- (3) Effective management and instructions
- (4) Personnel support and collaboration
- (5) And appreciation of student diversity.

Sense of community and social acceptance in desirable inclusive education settings, every student is value and nurtured. Such settings promote an environment in which all members are seen as equal, all have opportunity to contribute and all contributions are respected. Deno, Foegen, Robinsin, and Espion (1996), describe the ideal school settings as “caring and nurturant places with a strong sense community where is valued, and where the needs of all students are addressed. Students with special needs are truely include in their classroom communities only when they are appreciated by their teachers and society accepted by their classmates. Teachers play a very crucial

role in creating a positive classroom environment; for instance, teachers must have a positive attitude about students with special needs being in their classrooms. If they are not supportive of their inclusion, other students will detect this attitude and be less likely to accept the students. An understanding teacher more effectively meets students instructional and curricular needs, and social acceptance among classmates contribute to students self perception of values. Both of these goals are equally critical to creating effective inclusive settings and responsible learning environments. (Schaffner & Buswell, 1996); lang and Berberich (1995) suggest that inclusive classrooms should be characterize as settings where basic human needs are met.

Attention to Curricular Needs

There is need for effective modification of the curricular. Teachers can modify the academic level of the content and focus more on functional objectives, reduce the content to a manageable amount and change how students are asked to demonstrate mastering of the contents regular school curriculum should be modified to meet the diverse needs of special needs individual. If the individual curricular needs of special needs are not met the educational placement must be re-examined (Walther, Thomas, Korinek, Mclaughlin, & Withiams, 2000).

Effective Management and Instruction

This entails the use of classroom practices condusive to learning for students with diverse needs, these can include: successful classroom management, effective instructions technique, approach accommodative practices and instructional flexibility.

- **Successful classroom management:** Classroom that characterized by sound organizational and management system; classroom management including physical, procedure, instructional and behaviour management set the stage for smooth delivery of instruction."
- **Personnel support and collaboration:** some students with special needs require personnel supports to allow them to benefit from placement inclusive settings, in addition to the instructional supports noted earlier (accommodative practices and assistive technology) special education teachers; Para educators (teacher aids); and other related service professionals such as speech and language pathologist, occupational and physical therapist, and audiologists are typically involved in providing support to students with disabilities, they also assist regular teachers in inclusive settings through a variety of models, including collaboration, consultation, peer support systems, teachers assistance teams, and co-teachings. (Podemski et al, 1995, Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1994).
- **Appreciation of Students Diversity:** regular teacher in an inclusive settings needs to understand each individual in the classroom as well as possible. Different types of diversity exist within classroom settings, it is important to recognize each one. Schwitz and Kerge (1996) have identified the following types

of differences: racial and ethnic diversity, genders and sexual orientation, religious diversity; physical, learning and intellectual differences, linguistic differences and behaviour and personally diversity:

All students can benefit in an atmospheres in which diversity is recognized, opportunities exist to better understand its various forms, and difference are appreciated clearly, a classroom setting that accommodate differences, providers a welcoming environment for students whose learning, physical, emotional, and social needs vary from those of their classmates.

Inclusive Education Today

There is no concrete step that has been taken with regard to inclusive education in Nigeria. Even at policy level, integration remains the focus of planning special need education programmes. Although, professional associations concerned with the education of people with special needs, have been addressing the issue of inclusive education in the country for instance inclusive education was one of the major issues examined at the 12th Annual National Conference of the National Council for Exceptional Children held at Minna, Niger State. In August, 2002, in the key note address presented at the conference. TIM Obani (one of the pioneers in special needs education in the country). Argued that “the old special education system with its restrictive practices cannot successfully address the problems of special needs children, the answer lies in inclusion or inclusive education in changing and recognizing the entire school system to accept all children and cater to their varied “special” or “ordinary” learning needs and difficulties.

Presently in Nigeria, inclusion still remains in the realm of theory and far from practice special needs education is still grappling with problems of policy implementation. If inclusive education is been properly implemented with back-up from government and people, with enough mobilize resources and information dissemination, inclusive education is the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving equal educational opportunities for all.

The Way Forward/Recommendation

1. Education for all should therefore, focus prominently well on enabling the special needs child to acquire necessary life-skill. This can be done by integrating the Development Appropriate Practice (DAP) curriculum into academic programme for the special needs child. The frame work for the Developmentally appropriate practice are to impart the special needs child an ability to explore and interact meaningfully with the environment to understand the complexity and challenges of life, identify and foster potentials.
2. There should be proper monitoring and evaluation of educational provisions for special needs children in schools.
3. Diversification of school curriculum.

4. Government should make provisions for related instructional materials, equipments and supportive services for proper inclusive education.
5. Inclusive education programme was recognized to be the multidisciplinary and multidimensional program, therefore universal basic education commission (UBEC) and other agencies must put hand and deck to see that all challenges and minimized to allow effective implementation of inclusive education.
6. Individualized education programme procedure should be encouraged since it is learned based.
7. Education for special needs children should be quality driven and should be compensatory and competitive focused, so that special needs child will not only be re-equipped due to his impaired skills but also be prepared adequately to compete with has able-bodied peers in whatever are involved.

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