

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS IN INCLUSIVE SETTING IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

It is not enough to plan a lesson by a teacher or instructor especially in an inclusive classrooms but to adopt the appropriate and right channels of delivery known as instructional strategies. It is as a result of this fact that this paper titled: Instructional Strategies for Inclusive Classrooms in Inclusive Setting in Nigeria defines the concept of instructional strategies. Highlights inclusive classrooms; it also ex-ray types of instructional strategies which include attention, exploratory, sensory feedback among others. The paper further explains the importance of instructional strategies when properly deployed in an inclusive setting. Finally, the paper closes with some recommendation calling on government and stakeholders in the field of special needs education in Nigeria to ensure that adequate measures are put in place in order for both the special teacher, regular teacher and other personnel working in classrooms of learners with special needs do not derail from the practical aspects of their training so as to achieve positive and progressive outcome in the education of learners with special needs.

Keywords: Instructional Strategies, Inclusive Classrooms and Inclusive Education.

Bringing all categories of learner together those with special needs and without, to learn in the same classrooms for proper and effective management is gaining ground in Nigeria with the promotion of inclusive education especially with the charge by the United Nations that no child should be left behind, excluded or discriminated. It is the learning together of children and adults with special needs and those without special needs under the same roof or class that is referred to as inclusive classrooms He ward (2006). This is an integral part of inclusive education which is an educational practice where all learners learn together in the same classrooms in the same school environment National Policy on Special Needs Education (2015). It is observed that in the present time, the learner's academic

achievement has become a major direction for national unity, cultural integration and educational growth because academic achievement of the learners is the most suitable indicator to show that there is innovation and educational success Evans (2006). Therefore identifying the factors that promote learning and achievement continues to be an important area of research for educators across the globe. Researchers and writers in the field of special needs education in Nigeria are expressing concern about the relationship between the method or approach to instructional delivery and learner's achievement in inclusive classrooms, since in today's world inclusion has become a basic necessity in education of learners with special needs. Therefore, the researchers and writers are concerned about the strategies for enhancing the performance of the learners in overall subjects and activities that take place in the classroom Ozordi (2010). It is as a result of the above need for teachers to utilize the right instructional strategies that this paper discusses the following: Concept of instructional strategies, inclusive classrooms, types of instructional strategy and importance of instructional strategies.

Concept of Instructional Strategy

The term instruction which is derived from the Latin word *structure* which means to build or purposeful direction of teaching involves planning and management. Instruction is the act of directing, guiding, educating or giving steps that must be followed Evans (2006). This involves guiding and directing an individual through a planned exercise. According to Akpokiniovo, (2018) it is not enough for a student to be present in the classroom, for a student might be present in the classroom but he or she is not learning. This is associated with various factors such as the teacher not using the appropriate instructional strategies, the student not interested in the lesson or the student may not be psychologically motivated or present in the classroom even though physically present. It is to this end that the teachers and instructors should interchange their instructional strategies to bring about transformational teaching and learning especially as it has become imperative that teachers and instructors should follow child centered pedagogical approach. Instructional strategies are decisions about organizing people, materials and ideas to provide learning Nwachukon, (2005). This author viewed instructional strategies as both the teaching methods and the materials used in the process of teaching which lead to achieving the objectives of the lesson. Instructional strategies determine the approach a teacher may take to achieve learning objectives. There is no existing field of study which does not require use of appropriate instructional strategies in one way or the other. Most of the recent technological advancement from astronomical and space researches to industrial advancements, have deep root foundations in appropriate instructional strategies. Instructional strategies are techniques teachers use to help learners become independent and strategic learners. These instructional strategies become effective delivery channels when teachers or instructors independently select the appropriate ones and use them effectively to accomplish tasks or meet goals Afe (2003). Instructional strategies can motivate learners and help them focus, pay attention, organize information for understanding and remembering, monitor and assess learning. To become successful strategic teacher or instructor, learners need to be able to make meaning out of the lesson or course content, apply the meaning or understanding derived from the lesson in other situation or in solving problems Evans (2006). However, this will not be possible if

the appropriate instructional strategies are not adopted and utilized by the teacher or instructor to deliver, communicate and evaluate how much of the content and objectives of the lesson have been achieved. Therefore, it has become imperative to utilize the best practice and standard pedagogical approach in inclusive classrooms this 21st century most especially as inclusive classrooms are the bedrock of special needs education in Nigeria as stated in the National Policy on Education (2014). Apart from the fact that the Nigerian government adopted inclusive system of education for all individuals with special needs, the recent experience with the outbreak of COVID 19 pandemic which brought about new normal calls for activating the internationally acceptable pedagogical approach in our inclusive classrooms in Nigeria. Education has evolved to the point that it now calls for promotion of inclusion of all categories of learners either those with special needs such as learner with visual impairment, hearing impairment, autism spectrum, physical and health impairment, intellectual disability, learning disability, albinism or those with high precocity “gifted and talented” and those without special learning needs Oniyama and Asamaigo, (2018). Also, there is the global shift from the conventional instructional method of chalk and talk, paper and pencil, Braille and typewriter, sign language to e-learning, virtual classrooms and the use of assistive technology. With this innovation in education, both the special teacher, regular teacher and other personnel such as sign language interpreter, speech pathologist, mobility instructor and assistive technologist must be abreast with the appropriate instructional strategy to utilize in delivering lessons in classrooms of learners with special needs and most importantly must have deeper understanding and knowledge of the categories of special needs learner that is present in their classroom.

Inclusive Classrooms

According to the National Policy on Special Needs Education, (2015), Inclusive classrooms are where all learners be it one with mild impairment, health impairment and others with learning difficulties are brought together and giving instruction in the same classroom and environment. In doing this, the teachers or instructors are expected to utilize the instructional strategies that will address individual differences and peculiarities of all learners. Inclusive classrooms help to ensure that all learners can participate fully in the learning process, regardless of background, belief, or learning preference. It seek to find out why do some categories of learners seem to participate more frequently and learn more easily than others, how cultural assumptions influence interaction with learners and how teaching redesign encourage full participation and provide accessibility to all kinds of learners.

Inclusive classrooms are integrated classrooms comprising different learners with diverse abilities, strength and weakness Obi, Mensah and Avoke, (2007). Inclusive classrooms is a place where learning usually happens in small groups with peer helping and supporting each other. Inclusive classrooms are characterized by:

1. Different learners performing different activities at the same time because the teacher attends to each learner according to individual ability and strength.
2. More than one teacher. There is usually two or more teacher working in an inclusive classrooms including special teacher, regular teacher, sign language interpreter or Braille transcriber.

3. Team work. In an inclusive classroom, team work is usually encouraged between teachers and learners and between learners themselves Obi, Mensah and Avoke, (2007).

Unbundling knowledge in the classroom is no longer enough, teachers must integrate 21st century pedagogical skills, in addition to mastery of content, 21st century pedagogical skills include not only digital literacy but also skills such as adaption, initiative, management, collaboration, innovation and global thinking. These 21st century skills are measured by fluency in skills such as identifying problems, locating relevant information and delivering a thoughtful product or response.

Types of Instructional Strategies

Instructional strategies involves the choice, decision, method and style of delivering lesson's objectives or course content in a way and manner that the learners or students are able to make meaning, derive idea and apply knowledge in different dimensions. According to Oniyama and Asamaigo, (2018), a special teacher is distinct from a general or conventional teacher because of the instructional methodology they are trained to use which is different from those used in the general education classrooms, instructional materials and the environment in which they operate. Therefore, the following are the types of instructional strategies utilized in classrooms of learners with special needs:

1. Attention Strategy: This is a method adopted by the teacher to draw, motivate and arouse the interest of the learners to the subject matter. This have to do with how the lesson is introduced and how objectives are presented as well as the utilization of instructional materials, breaking of tasks into smaller ones progressing from known to unknown and above all, creating a better relationship and learning atmosphere Akpokiniovo (2018).

2. Exploratory Strategy: This is a situation or system in which the teacher present learning materials to the learner and allow him or her to explore and discover the facts and this will lead to achieving expected outcome. For instance, during mobility and orientation, reading and solving arithmetic or mathematical problem, the learner or student with special needs is given the task and allowed to explore with the teacher guiding.

3. Sensory Feedback Strategy: Sensory feedback is a method or pedagogical approach whereby the teacher after arousing the interest and drawing the attention of the learners and giving them task to explore demands feedback from the learner in the classroom. Here, the teacher allows the learner to deploy or use the remaining senses known as residual ability to produce the feedback. This could be sense of touch known as tactile sense used by learners with visual impairment, auditory sense, olfactory sense and kinaesthetic sense Abang (2005).

4. Peer Teaching Strategy: This is otherwise refer to as collaborative strategy and it is an instructional approach in which the teacher and learner carry out the task of teaching and learning together or between the learners themselves. Since some special needs learner are slow in assimilation rate and have intellectual deficit, peer teaching will help to gradually bring them to the point of achieving expected objectives. When one learner who have more understanding and experience of the subject work and practice with another learner, there is always improve and increase rate of performance and achievement in the classrooms of learners with special needs.

5. Functional Strategy: Functional pedagogical approach or instructional strategy is a practical application of skills or knowledge after exposure or under taking a particular learning exercise or experience Akpokiniovo, (2018).

Functional instructional strategy calls for engaging fully in the learning and then giving feedback by doing, operating or carrying out the expected task independently. For instance, how well can a learner operate a Perkins Braille machine, typewriter and other assistive technological devices Abang (2005).

There are other general instructional strategies apart from the specific ones listed above that can be utilized in classrooms of learners with special needs especially in an inclusive setting. Some of these instructional strategies include demonstration, discussion, inquiry and lecture among others. According to Saskatchewan Education, (2009), Instructional skills are the most specific category of teaching behaviours. They are necessary for procedural purposes and for structuring appropriate learning experiences for learners. These include such techniques as questioning, discussion, directing, giving, explaining and demonstrating. Hence, learners learn by doing, making writing designing, creating and solving.

Demonstration is the most widely used instructional method for the acquisition of practical skills as it involves verbal and practical illustrations of a given procedure. This method is seen to be highly effective because it involves active participation of the learners Ogwo & Orangu, (2006). Research findings by Ugwuanyi, (1998) on the effects of instructional approaches on students' academic performance indicated that students taught with demonstration performed significantly better than those taught with inquiry method. Inquiry is a technique which involves students using questioning to explore an area of study. It is a process student engage in to investigate and explain problems. Students collect and test data logically in order to discover why things happen the way they do. It is a student oriented strategy which requires active participation in questioning events and in putting several factors together (conceptualizing) to explore hypothesis or theory Saskatchewan Education, (2009). According to Obodo (1997), it is a method where the teacher could ask leading questions to guide the students to discover concepts. Ncharam (2005) studied the effects of inquiry and lecture methods on students' performance and observed the performance in favour of guided inquiry approach.

Discussion strategy is when two or more people interact verbally with each other. It could be used deliberately in teaching and learning situation, but sometimes it occurs spontaneously as a teacher uses one method of teaching or another. Discussion could be considered as a technique within a method (Umoren, 2001). Discussion strategy affords every member of the class opportunity to articulate his or her views on a particular issue and learning discovered in the process tends to last longer than when learning is imposed on the students. In true discussion, the teacher's contributions are very minimal and are made only when necessary.

Lecture method involves a verbal presentation of ideas, concepts, generalizations and facts. The practice in this method is that of spoon-feeding the learners with information or facts. The students remain passive and receive information from their teacher (Umoren, 2001).

Appropriate skills in the selection and utilization of instructional strategies are required by the teacher for effective teaching. There is no one best approach to instruction. Teaching effectively demands that the teacher must possess some basic

ability to organize, co-ordinate and utilize personal qualities, objectives and competency in lesson preparation, presentation and evaluation. Besides, he or she must be able to motivate the learners, make students active participant in learning, use appropriate strategies and facilities to enhance effectiveness in instructions (Vincent and Udeme, 2014).

Importance of Instructional Strategies

Instructional strategies when adequately deployed bring about immense benefit to both the teacher and the learner with special needs most importantly in an inclusive setting. Both of them aim at achieving a specific result or outcome at the end of a fruitful lesson and the driving force which is like the steering of a car that directs its movement, is the choice and appropriate utilization of instructional strategies which finally brings about realizing stated lesson's objectives Gargiulo (2008). Apart from achieving outlined lesson's objectives, other importance of instructional strategies include:

1. Sense of Direction: The right instructional strategy adopted in carrying out teaching and learning exercise gives the teacher or instructor sense of direction. Right from the introduction to evaluation, the teacher have a focus and a defined part to follow. For instance, if the teacher choose to use exploratory method or combination of two methods, it is that pedagogical approach or instructional strategy that will be deployed throughout the lesson period Abang (2005).

2. Increase Intelligence on the Part of Learners: Utilising appropriate instructional strategy lead to improvement in the intellectual ability of the learner with special needs most especially those with learning disabilities. Most teachers in the conventional or regular classrooms termed some learners with special needs or disabilities non-achievers because they do not have the prerequisite knowledge of how to use therapy to facilitate their learning and achievement. For example, children and adults with learning disability, if a teacher is not properly trained and experienced in this field, one may be discouraged or rescend teaching this category of learner with special needs Heward (2006).

3. Using the right kind of instructional strategy in classrooms of learner with special needs promote the principle of "no child is left behind". One of the United Nations sustainable development goals is to see that no child is left behind and when the teacher or instructor operates on the suitable and right channel of lesson delivery, all learners will be attended to, be it slow or fast learner.

4. Proof of Professionalism. Knowing and using the right and appropriate instructional strategy in delivering lesson in an inclusive setting is a plus and a proof of professionalism. It is very, very paramount to be cognizance of one's training and professional skills and acumen when it comes to managing learners with special needs. Since in the classrooms of learners with special needs, it requires more than one personnel but inter-disciplinary or team work, each personnel must be able to use the right skill at the right time Akpokiniovo (2018).

5. Promote Independent and Self actualisation: A situation whereby such instructional strategy such as exploratory is used, learners are giving the opportunity to learn independently and upon mastery, they become self-actualised or fulfilled due to personal experience and this is why in general education they refer to this type of strategy as experiential Gargiulo (2008).

Conclusion

Since inclusive education is a matter of government policy in Nigeria and with the wider publicity giving to it by researchers and writers in the field of special needs education, the practice is receiving needed attention and if success would be recorded in this direction, both the regular teacher and special teacher must utilize the appropriate instructional strategies. Understanding the concept of instructional strategies, concept of inclusive classrooms, types of instructional strategy and above all the importance of appropriately utilizing them as discussed in this paper will go a long way to boost better performance of teachers and other personnel working in an inclusive setting in Nigeria.

Recommendation

1. **Effective Training:** Special teachers should be exposed to effective training in the utilization of appropriate instructional strategies in classrooms of learner with special needs.
2. **In-service Training for Regular Teachers:** Any school where inclusive education is to be introduced, the regular teachers are to be made to go on in-service training in special needs education so that they can have the necessary knowledge to function and attend to all categories of learners.
3. There should be periodic evaluation of professionals working with special needs learner to ensure that they keep to standard and up-to-date in practical aspects of their training because most special teachers cannot Braille or use sign language.
4. Adequate instructional materials should be provided by the authority because to utilize appropriate instructional strategy it must be backed with the right instructional facilities otherwise, everything will amount to fruitless and unsuccessful effort as the expected outcome and result will not be achieved.

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