

# CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

*Inclusive education is the process of enabling all children to learn and participate effectively within regular school system without segregation but just very few of the many special needs children are fully inclusive to education in Nigeria. Therefore, this paper examines the critical area and challenges of implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria. Specifically, the paper examine the concept of inclusive education of people with special needs, some critical challenges faced by inclusive education in Nigeria, how to develop national inclusion policies, the global situation of inclusive education and developing inclusive teaching and learning. The paper also reviews current trends and global best practices of how effective inclusive education is in improving educational status of people with special needs and lastly suggests the following ways for improving inclusive education among children with special needs. Federal government should be fully committed to implementing inclusive education in Nigeria, teachers and other related personnel should be trained on what their roles should be in effective implementation of inclusive education, curriculum modification to accommodate learners with or without special needs should be made and awareness of proper understanding of the concept of inclusive education and its benefits should be made to people by the government.*

The shift towards having children with special needs to attend conventional schools with the so-called normal children without any segregation of the special need children is as a result of the feeling by educationist that “each child should be allowed to learn in his own pace and capability”. UNESCO(1994) states that “all children learn together whatever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have. Inclusive schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of students”. Inclusive education promotes learning and participation of parents and the community in planning and execution of services for children in general and the special needs in particular. Research indicates that when children with special needs are educated with their normal peers, positive academic and social outcomes occur for all children

involved. There are many challenges facing the implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria, some of which according to Eskey & Angie (2013) are:

- (1) Inadequate plans for identification of children with special needs.
- (2) Parents lack adequate information and guidance on special education services.
- (3) Lack of adequate provision for maintenance of education centres.
- (4) Parents are not even able to provide for the education of normal children even under the universal basic education in Nigeria.

Other challenges include inadequate funding from the government to cover the expenses of inclusive education, inadequate understanding of the concept of inclusive education and its benefits on the part of parents and other stakeholders and lack of training on the part of teachers on what their roles should be in effective implementation of inclusive education.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

Inclusive education is a process of enhancing the capacity of education system in any country to reach out to diverse learners. The essence of inclusion is that special need children are given the right to the benefits of a full school experience with needed modification and support alongside their normal peers. The UNESCO convention against discrimination in education (1960) and other international human rights prohibits any exclusion from, or limitation to education opportunities on the basis of socially ascribed or perceived difference such as sex, social origin, language, religion, nationality, economic condition and ability. In this context, UNCESCO (1994) promotes inclusive education systems that removes the barriers limiting the participation and achievement of all learners, respect diverse needs, abilities, characteristics and eliminates all forms of discrimination in the learning environment. According to the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education UKCSIE (2002), inclusive education is a program for all children and young people with or without disabilities or difficulties learning together in ordinary pre-primary provisions, schools, colleges and universities with appropriate network of support.

### **Some Critical Challenges Faced by Inclusive Education in Nigeria**

For decades Nigeria has been faced by problems of implementing inclusive education. The Nigerian National Policy on Education (1977, 1981, 2004 and 2009) stated policies on inclusive education, but the need for inclusive education goes beyond policy making. The government should be fully committed to fully implementing the inclusive education policy. Garuba (2003) observes that Nigeria and most countries of African are still grappling with the problem of making provisions for children with special needs even on mainstreaming basis. The reason for this scenario is not far fetched as inclusive education requires a lot of provisions both human and material. This situation has posed serious challenges because, implementing inclusive education without adequate provisions will amount to jeopardizing the interest of

students with special needs. The Nigeria National Policy on Education (1977, 1981, 2004, and 2009) all confirms the policy statement of the Nigerian government that:

“To give concrete meaning to the idea of equalizing educational opportunities for all children regardless of their physical, sensory mental psychological or emotional disabilities and provide adequate education for all people with special needs.”

Section 1(c) states that every Nigerian child shall have a right to equal educational opportunities irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities, each according to his or her ability.

Full inclusion therefore demands that children with special needs should be in the same class with the so called normal children. The demand of this type of education is enormous and is bound to face a lot of challenges some of these challenges include:

1. Expensive nature of inclusive education and the problem of inadequate funding from the part of the government. Implementing Inclusive education is quite expensive in nature because a lot of human and material resources are needed. The government is not able to provide enough resources for the general education talk less of inclusive education that is more expensive.
2. Challenge of lack of trained teachers and other trained personnel professionals and specialist to make inclusive education possible.
3. Challenge of poor understanding of the concept of inclusive education. Many people misunderstand its meaning and benefits which makes its implementation difficult.
4. Challenge of inadequate provision of accommodating environment for children with special needs to be able to learn in conventional schools. An architectural barrier free environment that will allow the special needs to move from one place to another are not considered in the building structure of most Nigerian schools.

### **Developing National Inclusion Policies**

To develop, inclusion policies there is a need to consider the following;

1. What policies promote inclusion and which ones go against it?
2. What are the existing barriers at the policy level that can act as a deterrent to the practice of inclusion and how can this issue be addressed?
3. How can suitable guidelines address and facilitate inclusion be prepared and followed?
4. How can debate and discussion be generated among relevant stakeholders to promote inclusion?

The Nigerian National Policy on Education (1977, 1981, 2004, and 2009) confirm the policy on inclusive education, hence it is expected that the government of Nigeria should be committed to the full implementation of inclusive education policy. Advanced countries of the world have gone beyond policy making and have adopted full inclusion in the education setting. Folanke (2009) states that Nigeria is known to have some of the best laws on inclusive education in Africa but their implementation

has remained the main problem due to various hindrances for example; inadequate funding by government, lack of understanding of inclusive education and its benefits, inadequate trained teachers and needed personnel to make inclusive education possible.

### **The Global Situation of Inclusive Education**

Inclusive education is a global agenda which postulates full inclusion of children with special needs in all aspects of schooling that other children have the ability to access. The importance of inclusive education is set out in the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development (Agenda 2030), which places emphasis on quality and learning (UN 2015). The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) promises to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

The right to education is clearly defined in international policy and human rights framework. The UN convention on the rights of persons with Disabilities (CRPD 2016) sets out the responsibility of states to provide an inclusive education system at all levels. Article 24 states that people with special needs have the right to education on an equal basis with others and without discrimination. The CRPD committee further articulates the right to education for people with special needs. Global best practices in inclusive education are identified practices or interventions that are linked to specific outcomes and contribute to improved provision of education for children with special needs.

### **Effectiveness of Inclusive Education In Improving Educational Status of People with Special Need**

Darma (2012) lists the following benefits of inclusive education to children with special needs.

1. It offers a sense of belonging to the diverse human family
2. It provides a diverse stimulating environment in which to grow and learn
3. It involves in feeling of being a member of a diverse community
4. It enables development of friendship
5. It enhances self-respect
6. It provides affirmation of individuality
7. It provide peer models
8. It provide opportunities to be educated with same aged peers.

Salend (2005), Smith Palloway, Patton and Dawdy (2006) summarize the effectiveness of inclusion: this research indicates that at the elementary school level, students with special needs who are included in general education curricula can benefit socially and academically without facing the stigma of segregation or pull out classrooms. Standards for behavior and instruction are higher, and children with

special needs have more opportunities to reach higher standard and become independent learners.

Education in an inclusive education setting has academic and social benefit for all student with or without disability. Studies indicate that students without disabilities can benefit from inclusive setting. Findings reveal that academic performance is equal or superior to comparative groups of students educated in a non-inclusive setting. Friendship and awareness of diversity are also benefits of the inclusive settings for individuals without disability (Vollmer & Vollmer 2002). Implementation of inclusive education system as against segregation system is more effective in improving educational status of people with special needs.

### **Conclusion**

Inclusive education is about looking at the ways Nigerian classrooms, school environments and school programs and lessons are designed so that all children can participate and learn. It is also about finding different ways of teaching so that classrooms and other school activities actively involve all children. This will develop relationship, friendship and mutual respect between the so-called normal children and the special need children and between teachers in the school. In this way teachers need to be creative and think about ways to make the schools a place where all children can participate. Creativity may mean teachers learning to teach in different ways or design the lessons so that all children can be involved.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are made:

1. The Nigerian government should be fully committed to the implementation of inclusive education at local, state and federal levels.
2. Teachers and other related personnel should be trained on what their roles should be in effective implementation of inclusive education
3. The curriculum should be modified to accommodate learners with or without special needs.
4. Awareness on proper understanding of the concept of inclusive education and its benefit should be made to people by the government.
5. Government should consider architectural barrier free school structure to ease movement for children with special needs in schools

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