

CHALLENGES OF ADOPTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN NIGERIAN SCHOOL SYSTEM

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Abstract

Inclusive education is an emerging concept that has recently drawn the attention of both local and international stakeholders in education. Global organizations with educational concerns, such as the United Nations Organization (UNO), United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) etc, are also not left out in the intellectual discourse concerning the success of inclusive education world over. Irrespective of the importance attached to this issue, a lot of challenges still dangle in the face of the successful adoption of the programme. It is for this reason that this article tries to x-ray and analyze some of these challenges. In doing so, the article critically analyzed some issues emanating from the adoption in Nigeria. Such issues include, some global and local framework underpinning the adoption of inclusive education, the current state of inclusive education and challenges that are militating against its successful adoption in Nigeria

Key words: Challenges, Inclusive Education, Adoption

Education is the anchor for national development and any nation working towards sustainable development must recognize education as such. There is no doubt though that nations of the world, Nigeria inclusive, are revolutionizing their education system to help them achieve national economic growth and stability. It therefore, becomes imperative that every member of the society, notwithstanding the physical condition should be given equal opportunity to benefit maximally from the education

system. In the past 10 years, there have been considerable activities in many countries to move educational policies and practice in more inclusive direction. Uroh and Nwoke (2010) in Asiwe and Omiegbe (2014) opined that it is in the bid to get all nations of the world to provide quality basic education as enunciated by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agenda and the Education for All (EFA) that propelled the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) in collaboration with United Nations International Cultural and Scientific Education Fund (UNICEF) to adopt a protocol to refocus the attention of the Nigerian populace on the benefit of enshrining inclusive education in our school health programme. This is aimed at bringing an end to an era of segregation in Nigerian school system.

To Allen and Schwartz (2000), inclusive education means that all students attend and are welcome by their neighbourhood schools in the appropriate age, into regular classes and are supported to learn, to contribute and participate in all aspect of life of the school. Inclusive education is about how we develop and design our schools, classrooms, programmes and activities so that all students learn and participate together. It is about the child's right to participate and the school's duty to accept the child. Inclusion rejects the use of special schools or classrooms to separate students with disabilities from students without disabilities. A premium is placed upon full participation by students with disabilities and upon respect for their social, civil and educational rights. Full inclusion does not distinguish between special education and general education programmes, instead the school is restructured so that all students learn together. It is a new approach in the provision of services for learners with special needs. It is also the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, of creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all as they provide an effective education for the majority of children. In all these United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2009) gave an all encompassing definition of inclusive education to mean a process of transforming schools and other centers of learning to accommodate all learners including boys and girls, learners from ethnic and linguistic minorities, rural populations, those infected and affected by HIV and AIDS, those with disabilities and difficulties in learning and as well provide opportunities for all. UNESCO (2011) complements the earlier definition in her later definition of inclusion in education as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities and reducing exclusion from education.

Inclusion is based on the assumption that:

- The original place of the child with special needs is in the regular classroom. Therefore no condition should be allowed to remove him/her from that environment.

- All children have the right to learn and play together. Inclusion is thus a fundamental human right.
- Denying opportunity for children to learn under the same roof with other children is devaluing and discriminatory.
- Exclusion is inhuman and indefensible

One thing quite obvious here is that before a nation will talk about inclusive education that segregation must have existed in one form or the other. Those people with special needs are sometimes given different labels such as disabled, handicapped, impaired, exceptional etc (Asiwe and Omiegbe, 2014). Segregation is observed in the Nigerian school system in many dimensions (between those with special needs and those without). For instance, there are schools for the blind and for the deaf and dumb etc. Many children with other forms of disabilities and challenges could also not be easily absorbed into the school system. All these are segregations in one form or the other.

Garuba (2003) observed that Nigeria and most countries of Africa 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 farfetched 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 interests of students with special needs. It is on this premise that stakeholders in education are working in collaboration with some agencies of United Nations Organization (UNO) to put together instruments aimed at addressing inequalities, discrimination and exclusion in education around the world.

Global Framework for Inclusive Education

There have been several global and national normative instruments and frameworks to which Nigeria subscribes as a member of the United Nations and UNESCO. These instruments and frameworks have greatly influenced Nigeria's view and approaches to the concept of inclusive education. Some of these instruments and frameworks are the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education. This Convention is a multinational treaty adopted by UNESCO on 14th December 1960 in Paris aiming at combating all forms of discrimination, including racial, compelled or forced, segregation and exclusion in the field of education. It came into force in 1962. (Wikipedia, 2014). Furthermore we also have the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) which sets out children's rights in respect of freedom from discrimination and in respect of representation of their wishes and views. There is also the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (1979), the United Nations

Disability Convention (2005), the World's Education Forum/Framework for Action (2010), the UN Millennium Development Goals Declaration (2000), the Child Rights Act (2003). In June 1994, representatives of 92 governments and 25 international organizations formed the World Conference on Special Needs Education, held in Salamanca, Spain. At the Salamanca conference, a new framework for action was adopted. The guiding principle of which is that ordinary schools should accommodate all children, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. Specifically the framework states that regular schools with inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discrimination, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all. According to this framework, schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic and other circumstances. (Ajuwon, 2008)

Inclusive education received another boost in 1990 by the UNICEF sponsored Jomtien declaration of Education For All (EFA) movement committed to providing quality basic education for all children, youth and adults. This movement led to the organization of the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000 tagged the Dakar Framework for Action. The six EFA goals are supposed to be met by 2015. We also have the United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disability (UNCRPD) (2006), the UNESCO (2009) policy guideline on inclusive education. All these frameworks, declarations and policy guidelines are made to promote the adoption of inclusive education world over.

Inclusive Education in Nigeria: State of the Arts

The rate at which countries of the world accept inclusive education varies. While advanced countries of the world have gone beyond policy making and have adopted full inclusion in their education system, other developing countries like Nigeria are yet to make adequate provision for the education of their physically handicapped children. Garuba (2003) observed that no concrete step has been taken with regards to inclusive education in Nigeria. Continuing, he pointed out that even at the policy level; integration remains the focus of planning special education programmes. Writing in support of this view, Folanke (2009) added 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 different hindrances. For instance, in 1993 the federal government enacted a legislation on the handicapped- “the Nigerians with disability decree” to provide a clear and comprehensive legal protection and security for Nigerians with disability, as well as establish a standard for enhancement of the rights and privileges, guaranteed under this decree and other laws applicable to the disabled in the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Another significant step towards comprehensive education reform

was the passing into law of the Compulsory Free Universal Basic Education Act (2004). Aja-Okorie (2010) also identified some government policy interventions targeted at inclusive education in Nigeria to include, the enactment of three crucial activities which were (i) signing of the UNESCO National Education Strategy (UNESS) for Nigeria (2006-2015) which was the outcome of a two-day UNESCO/Federal Ministry of Education stakeholders round table. (ii) The launch of Community Accountability and Transparent Initiatives (CATTI), (iii) the publication of national plan based on the education sector situation analysis which clearly reveals the serious dysfunctional state of Nigerian education.

Inclusive education has revolved around several key issues since the first edition of the National Policy on Education in 1977. These are:

- That government has the responsibility of taking care of its citizens and providing the best means and opportunities to enable each individual maximize his/her abilities and potentials
- That access to education is a fundamental human right of the child
- That the recognition and identification of the range of needs –common and special is the key strategy in planning for and meeting the needs of all categories of learners
- That there is ability in disability
- That there are about 10,000,000 Nigerian children who are out of school
- That HIV/AIDS continues to be a major issue among out of school children who are orphaned.

The National Policy on Education has always recognized the issues and different needs of potential groups of learners- their physical, social, mental, economic status notwithstanding and in relation to the formal education system. 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 abilities. Section 19(1) and (3) of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria(1999) states that “Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy, and to this end, government shall as and when practicable provide: (a) free, compulsory, and universal primary education, (b) free secondary education, (c) free university education, and (d) free adult literacy programmes.

In recognition of the existence of people with disabilities, the National Policy on Education (2004) classified such people into three categories such as the disabled, the disadvantaged and the gifted and talented.

1. **The Disabled:** These are people with impairments (physical or sensory) who because of these impairments/disabilities cannot cope with regular school/class organization and methods without formal training. People under this category include,

- Visually impaired (blind and partially sighted)
- Hearing impaired (deaf and the partially hearing)
- Physically and health impaired (deformed limbs, asthmatic, mentally retarded)
- Emotionally disturbed (hyperactive, hypoactive/the socially maladjusted/behaviour disorder)
- Speech impaired (stammerers/stutterers)
- Learning disabled (psychological/neurological educational phobia and challenges)

2. **The Disadvantaged:** These are the children of the nomadic pastorals, migrant fishers, folks, migrant farmers, hunters etc, who due to their life styles and means of livelihood, are unable to have access to conventional education provision and therefore require special education to cater for their particular/peculiar needs and circumstances.

3. **The Gifted and Talented:** These are people who are endowed with special traits (in arts, creativity, music, leadership, intellectual precocity etc) and therefore find themselves insufficiently challenged by the regular school/college/university programmes.

Nigeria has not focused adequately to full inclusion but this notwithstanding; a lot of energy and resources has been dissipated on studies, researches and writings by educationists towards drawing the attention of stakeholders in education to the need for adoption of inclusive education in Nigerian school system. This has led to organization of a number of conferences and seminars. It is argued that the old special education system with its restrictive practices cannot successfully address these problems of special needs children. The answer thus lies in inclusion or inclusive schooling in changing and reorganizing the entire school system to accept all children and cater for their varied special or ordinary learning needs and difficulties Obani (2002). The big question is, how possible is it to adopt inclusive education in Nigerian school system in the face of numerous teething problems ravaging the system.

Challenges of Inclusive Education in Nigeria

Inclusive education is the philosophy and practice of educating students with disabilities in general education settings. Supporters of inclusive education take the position that homogenous grouping impedes equal education for all. There are lots of issues to be considered and conditions to be met in order to make inclusion effective. The reason for this is not farfetched. These groups of children with disabilities have

special needs in many areas of life as it affects their physical ability. Some are deaf, dumb, lame, blind and other forms of disabilities. Full inclusion therefore demands that children with some of these disabilities should be in the same class with normal children. The demand of this type of education is enormous. Some of these challenges are discussed below.

Challenge of Lack of Trained Teachers in Special Areas: For a child with disability to benefit maximally from inclusion, it is imperative for general education teachers to be able to teach a wider array of children including those with varying disabilities. Some of these disabilities require teachers that are specially trained. For instance, blind students need to be taught how to use brail machine, the deaf and dumb students need to be taught how to understand and use sign language. The implication of this is that these specially trained teachers should be available in adequate numbers in each school. On the contrary, learners with disabilities will be disadvantaged.

Inadequate Funding for Procuring the Required Resources: These physically challenged children also need specialized resources that are quite different from the ones used by normal children such as brail machines, walking sticks, wheel chairs etc. Some of these resources are quite expensive to procure. The provision of these resources requires adequate funding and when the fund is not there it becomes an uphill task to provide them.

Provision of Essential Services: To Wiles and Bondi (2011), inclusion involves keeping special needs students in regular education classrooms and making support services available to them rather than bringing the them without support services. To this end, it becomes necessary to provide essential services needed by learners in their different areas of disabilities. The blind students need to be taken around from one place to another while in school. If it is a higher institution, they need to be guided from one lecture hall to another. The lame students also need help to move from one place to another regardless of the fact that they are on wheel chairs because most of the school structures are not built in consideration of the disabled. Somebody has to carry them across gutters, they need help to climb the staircase and to tackle some other challenges posed by their disability. A visit to Nigerian schools will prove that most of these required services are not available. Furthermore, most school structures are not built with the comfort and convenience of the children with disabilities in mind.

Problem of the Gifted being in the same Class with slow Learners

In this type of classroom, the two groups of learners are faced with some challenges. If the teacher wants to move at the pace of the gifted, the slow learners will find it difficult to cope and therefore could be left behind. On the other hand, if she

wants to carry the slow learners along, the gifted will no longer feel challenged but will gradually get demoralized and discouraged. The problem here becomes how to carry both groups along which may not be very easy.

Ridicule by Other Students: Putting these children with special educational needs with normal children is sometimes demoralizing to them. Other children without disability sometimes see them as objects of ridicule. This type of attitude keeps them uncomfortable and can even lead them to dropping out of school.

Teachers' Inability to use Individualized Instructional Method of Teaching: The children with disabilities need special attention in many ways. They need to be allowed to proceed at their own pace and to do this requires that the teacher should create more time for them using other methods that suit their conditions.

Expensive Nature of Inclusive Education: As was indicated earlier, a lot of resources are required for inclusive education programme to enable children with special education needs to benefit maximally. It has not been quite easy for the government to provide the needed resources in the general education system let alone the inclusive education which requires extra and more expensive human and material resources.

Lack of Understanding of the Concept and Definition of Inclusive Education: Poor understanding of what constitutes inclusive education tends to make the adoption difficult. Many people understand this concept quite differently. Some understand it to mean integration while some see it as mainstreaming. Therefore a clear clarification of the concept is necessary for effective planning and implementation to take place.

Lack of Accurate Data on the Number of Children with Disabilities: It is important to note that poor record keeping constitutes a major challenge to effective planning for the learning needs of the children with disabilities. Despite the efforts of the government in adopting interventions towards inclusive education, problems of reliable records still persist. This complex situation according to Aja-Okorie (2010) is further aggravated with the problem associated with lack of accurate current data on the number of children with disabilities. The need to keep accurate data is necessary because there are different kinds of disabilities and every case requires special care.

Other challenges of inclusive education identified by Aja-Okorie (2010) include:

- Challenges arising from its wide-based coverage in scope and practice
- Challenges arising from poverty and other forms of social exclusion and cultural marginalization
- Effects of gender concept, issues and education on inclusive education
- Curriculum rigidity

- Problems associated with location of schools

According to the EFA Nigerian Report Cards for 2005, 2006, and 2007, several important challenges still persist in the education sector that tends to affect inclusive education adversely. They include;

- Lack of adequate available reliable and up-to-date baseline data to facilitate effective planning
- Inappropriate socio-cultural and religious practices
- Massive neglect in the development of functional school libraries over the years
- Erratic and inadequate funding of projects and programmes
- Enforcement of instruction in the mother tongue
- Providing unhindered access to about seven million school age children
- Providing 251,031 classrooms to meet the expansion in access
- Providing child-friendly environment through the renovation of dilapidated physical structures and home grown school feeding and health programme for learners
- The non-formal sector faces the challenges of repositioning in order to address the world of work and economic empowerment. It has to develop programmes that are flexible so as to cater for the needs of out-of-school youths including pregnant girls and young mothers.
- Funding remains a huge challenge in all sectors and particularly so in the non-formal education sector with serious implications for the adequate provision of basic infrastructure, equipment, instructional materials and transportation for facilitators, teachers and supervisors to reach distant places
- The need for the integration of learning in the non-formal setting into formal context, which would enable learners to transit from formal education/learning context
- The HIV/AIDS challenges are highlighted in terms of urgent need to ensure that school intervention programmes are implemented
- Teachers and counselors need to be trained to provide effective HIV/AIDS prevention services
- All teachers need to be trained in the use of FLHE (Family Life Health Education) curriculum (FME, 2006)

Conclusion

Inclusive education is an all inclusive education programme that requires a whole lot of commitment from all stakeholders in education to make it work (Teachers, learners themselves, education authorities, government etc). All these groups have a lot to contribute to its success. Non-compliance or lip service from any of the stakeholders creates loopholes which consequently heralds the barrage of challenges identified

above. There should therefore, be a plan by the authorities or school management to provide a plan to support teachers and students through good inclusive practices such as, collaboration, team work, innovative instructional practices, peer-strategies and more.

Recommendations

Having analyzed some of the identified challenges of inclusive education in Nigeria, it has become imperative that recommendation be made towards surmounting such challenges.

1. Training and recruiting of teachers in the areas of need: Teachers should be trained in adequate numbers to cater for the differing needs of the children with disabilities. Additionally, in-service training programmes could also be organized for the existing teachers to update them in the needed skills, knowledge and strategies for teaching children with disabilities. Seminars, conferences and workshops could also go a long way in updating the knowledge base of the teachers.
2. Sourcing and keeping accurate data of children with disabilities and the various forms of disabilities will ensure adequate planning which should be proactive and realistic. The planning should be focused on quality and functionality.

Other recommendations that will increase the prospect for the success in inclusive education in Nigeria include:

3. Increasing campaigns to create awareness and enlighten parents on the need to send their children with one form of disability or the other to school.
4. There should be adequate provision of human and material resources to cater for the immediate needs of children with disabilities in and, outside the school.
5. School structures should be constructed bearing in mind the comfort and convenience of the disabled.

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