

# FACILITATING EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS THROUGH THE UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION SCHEME

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## **Abstract**

This study examined the place of Universal basic Education in facilitating the education of children with special needs, concept of special education, the exceptional children; categories of exceptional children were discussed. Problems of exceptional children and why they deserve attention as well as stakeholders in education sector raising up to meeting their needs through effective implementation of Universal Basic Education were not left out in the body of this work. Major recommendations such as the need to engage in headcount of children with special needs, early identification and diagnosis as well as placement of pupils in age appropriate classroom were included.

## **Introduction**

Education as one of the societal institutions has been a subject of constant discussion and debate among stakeholders, curriculum agencies, school administration, policy makers and implementers, etc. Education has continued to attract the attention of everybody-adults and youth in the society. it has experienced series of changes and reforms noticeably during the post independence era till the current political dispensation. It is not strange to note that for many decades all over the world, education is viewed as a phenomenon with insurmountable challenges which have captured the public spotlight (Kerry, 2002). Education is expected to enable students express meaningfully their individuality which then becomes the wealth of the nation

The importance of education to any given country be over emphasized that is the reason why many nations of the world have embraced it. Nigeria government has equally embraced education in its totality. National Policy on Education (NNPE 2004) state that, every Nigeria child shall have a right to educational opportunities irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities..." Nigeria as a nation is committed to Education For All (EFA) by 2015 she has equally made education tuition free and compulsory for pupils and students under Universal Basic Education (UBE). The UBE programme was officially launched on October 20, 1999 in Sokoto, Sokoto State" (Amori, 2005).

The writer has observed with dismay that despite benefits inherent in Universal Basic Education, children with special needs have not fully embraced and tapped into it due to a number of problems such as inaccessibility, inadequate sensitization programme, lack of funding inability of the government to come up with accurate figure of persons with disabilities, lack of specialists to carry diagnostic procedures, and lack of knowledge of general classroom teachers to detect a child in their classroom having required special attention as well as wrong placement of children with special needs in classes and schools where their needs are not taken into cognizance.

Against this background and considering the enormous resource challenge for the special education subsector in Nigeria today, it becomes highly imperative to examine the place of Universal Basic Education in facilitating the education of children with special needs.

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### **Concept of Special Education**

Yepwi (2008), defines special education as education aimed at meeting the special learning needs of learners in order to assist them to attain their optimum development, and to live a meaningful interactive life in the mainstream of the community. Special education is designed in order to address challenges pose to an individual and to enable him/her attain a meaningful life. Abang (2005) explained that the aims of special education is to train is to train the child to be an oak. Strong and independent, self-reliant rather than grow like a pumpkin or vine, weak and dependent.

Obaje (2007)., highlighted further the aims of special needs

- (i) To provide educational, social and emotional benefit to all exceptional children.
- (ii) To enrich the lives of children with special needs education or those who are socially disadvantaged.
- (iii) To run special workshops, both in and out of schools, for children special needs education that will increase their confidence and self-esteem.
- (iv) To provide children with special needs with unique opportunities to work and play as real equals with their mainstream schools that will benefit all the children involved, and facilitates the “inclusion” process.
- (v) To work at winning-over the hearts and minds of those involved to a commitment to the full participation of those with disability into society and
- (vi) To meet the needs of the exceptional persons and help them to grow into mature adults who can take decisions that are worthwhile.

At this juncture, special education is no longer the exclusive domain of special education service providers. At some time or other, practically all school teachers will have exceptional children in their classroom. And with the emphasis on inclusion and the market decrease in the institutionalization of persons with exceptionalities, as a society we are becoming increasingly aware that these individuals are important members of the human community.

### **Who is an Exception Child?**

A child is considered as exceptional when his or her differences or disabilities occur to such a degree that school practices must be modified to serve the child's needs. The term exceptional child could be referred to as bright child or the child with unusual talent. It could also be used to describe any atypical child. In other words, exceptional child include the child with developmental disabilities and the child who is exceptionally able. That is, exceptional child is a child who differs significantly from average or normal in:

- i) Mental characteristics.
- ii) Sensory abilities.
- iii) Communication abilities
- iv) Behaviour and emotional development
- v) Physical characteristics.

### **Categories of Exception Children**

1. Children who are gifted and talented
2. Children with mental retardation
3. Children with learning disabilities
4. Children with behaviour problems.
5. Children with communication disorders in speech and language

6. Children who are deaf or hard of hearing
7. Children with visual impairments
8. Children with multiple and serve disabilities.
9. Children with physical disabilities and health impairments.

### **Problems of Exceptional Children**

There are enormous problems confronting exceptional children and these range from age of the on-set of disability, nature of the disability, severity of the disability, sex of the disabled person, acceptance vs. rejection, denial, discrimination, hostile home, school etc. environment, socio-cultural values, norms traditions prejudices etc. religions, and so forth are some of the challenges often faced by exceptional children.

**Age of the on-set of Disability:** The age of the on-set of disability would determine how well exceptional child adjusts in life for instance a persons who was born blind will adjust better than a person who suddenly became blind having enjoyed vision for a good number of years.

**Nature of the Disability:** The natures of disabilities are at variance. This range from mild, moderate, severe or profound. A persons with moderate disability is likely to excel in task that does not require too much intelligence when compared to a person with severe disability e.g. learning disability, mental retardation etc.

**Sex of the Exceptional Child:** A blind young girl would enjoy more public sympathy than a grown up blind male adult. The feeling of understanding expected from the public by these two persons will be greatly different.

Another problems encounter by exceptional children is denial. Presence of a disabled child in the family often poses treat to the existing joy and happiness. One of the major forces that influences the exceptional child, or any child, is the family. If a family accepts a child with special needs, it will reduce the burden of handicap imposes on him or her by the handicapping condition.

Culture is also crucial issue that is affecting exceptional child. Culture refers to the attitudes, values customs, and language that family and friends transmit to children. These attitudes, values customs, and language have been passed down from generations of ancestors and have formed an identifiable pattern or heritage. Culture of a particular family or society is found to have whether positive or negative influence on the exceptional child.

### **Universal Basic Education**

The UBE evolved as an innovation necessitated by the global trends in the provision of basic education for all and sundry it came into existence as a result of a drive to provide accessible, basic and quality education for all children in 2015 irrespective of tongue, tribe, creed or religious beliefs or affiliation.

Obanja (2000), defined Universal Basic Education (UBE) as an essential tool for liberating the creative energies of the Nigerians for the task of National development. He argued that the state of progress in Nigeria and its ranking among nations of the world are not measured by affluence of a few, but by the quality of life of the average citizens.

The major objective of the programme as conceived in 199 are:

- (i) Development in the entire citizenry, a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion
- (ii) The provision of free, Universal Basic Education for every Nigerian child of school age.
- (iii) Reducing drastically the incidence of drop-out from formal school system, through improved relevance, quality and efficiency
- (iv) Creating for the learning needs of young persons, who for one reason or another had to interrupt their schooling through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the promotion of basic education.
- (v) Ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy communicative and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for lifelong learning (UBE Act 2004, pg 16)

As laudable as the scheme appears, it could only realize its objectives when adequate facilities, effective monitoring system, and effective continuous guidance and counseling services etc. are put in place.

However, as earlier on mentioned of the objectives of UBE programme below are noticeably shortcomings of the scheme

- (i) Unprecedented population explosion of primary school pupils.
  - (ii) Insufficient personnel
  - (iii) Lack of funds
  - (iv) Unfavourable government policies
  - (v) Lack of uniformity in the implementation of the programme by some state government.
- And this accounts for imbalances in education still experience in the country.

### **Universal Basic Education and Special Needs Children**

The UBE programme as earlier on pointed out is a tuition free, basic and compulsory education for every Nigeria child. The condition of this programme also established the fact that disability does not count. Therefore, it becomes a right for every Nigerian child to have access to quality and basic education. The National Policy on Education (2004) section 10 of the document states the objectives of this policy as “ to give concrete meaning to the idea of equalizing educational opportunities for all children their physical, mental and emotional disabilities notwithstanding” to provide adequate education for all handicapped children and adults in order that they may fully play their roles in the development of the nation”.

The policy provides for free education at all levels for children with special needs, as well as necessary facilities and infrastructure including inclusive education. This is in consonant with UBE programme and Education for all (EFA) to provide education for all categories of children regardless of their differences.

Nigeria government at the centre, state and local levels have put measures in place to ensure that education is provided for all and sundry. This is depicted in their policies statement and as contain in each. State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB). However, it is disheartening to note that this laudable project has not been fully accessed by children with special needs as a result of the following reasons

- (i) Lack of data based information on number age, sex, type of disability
- (ii) Lack of trained specialists
- (iii) Misappropriation of meager educational funds
- (iv) Lack of equipment and facilities

- (v) Hostile environment
- (vi) Unhealthy academic rivalry between and non-disabled persons
- (vii) Lack of data based information on disabled persons.

### **The Place of Universal Basic Education in Facilitating Education of Children with Special Needs**

Enhanced performance in the education of children with special needs can only be achieved through effective implementation and delivery of services of UBE programme when stakeholders in education sector face up their challenges. National Population Commission (NPC) should be saddled with the responsibility to provide the total number of disabled adults, youth and school children, their age range, the nature of their disability extent of disability, age of the on-set of disability etc. that are in the country. The moment this figure is given, adequate provision in terms of number of both human and materials resources to be made available would be evenly distributed.

Another way UBE programme can facilitate education of children with disabilities is that diagnostic assessment and early intervention strategies must be put in place. Assessment is very crucial for placement purposed of disabled persons so that he or she can be placed in age appropriate classroom and early intervention strategies can be administered. This is done to minimize disability and enhance ability inherent in the disabled person.

Sufficient number of trained specialist teachers, facilitators, care-givers etc. is also very crucial for UBE to facilitate education of children with special needs. For effective implementation of UBE programme, staff must be adequate in terms of quality and quantity. Periodic attendance of workshops, seminars and conferences and provision of in-service programmes would assist teachers of persons with special needs in keeping abreast with new development in the field.

Another factor crucial to UBE in facilitating education of children with special needs is that persons with special needs should be incorporated into committee overseen the running of UBE programme. They should be involved in making decisions on issues that concern and affect them. Their non involvement and participation in discussion on issue that affect them often places them at disadvantaged

### **Conclusion**

The need to make education accessible to children with special needs cannot be over emphasized. This is because all over the world education is regarded as a moving force for development in all spheres of the economy therefore, efforts should be made by all tiers of government to make it tuition free, basic and compulsory for all categories of children with disabilities.

### **Recommendation**

- (1) Government needs to set up a Board of Special Needs Education to meet periodically and discuss on issues that affect and concern them.
- (2) Government should saddle Nation Population Commission (NPC) to come up with accurate figure of persons with disabilities.
- (3) Early screening, diagnosis and intervention strategies should commence immediate to savage the souls of children with special needs.

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