

ADMINISTRATIVE STRATEGIES FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION IN THE 21st CENTURY

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Abstract

This short paper sets out to explore the administrative strategies for special education in the 21st century. To tackle the problem, an attempt was made to answer the following questions like; the concept of special education, types of disabilities, obnoxious treatment meted to the disabled, and the effective administrative strategies for special education. Based on the answers given, recommendations were made as follows: that awareness should be created on causes and curative measures on disability and well equipped, funded, managed, vocation and education centres be set up by the government for these handicap children.

Introduction

Education has been seen as the bedrock of any nation and none should be deprived of it, able or disabled. Education is the source of hope for survival to every individual and cannot be denied be it formal or informal. Most children are denied of this hope for no fault of theirs because they are tagged disabled. But the fact remains that there is ability in disability. Some have made it after weddling through storm and sunshine without any encouragement from people or government. What these children need is empathy and not sympathy; therefore, they should be given a special education to enable them live a normal, meaningful and fulfilled life. The National Policy on Education (FRN, 1998), stipulates the need for equality of educational opportunities to all Nigerian children irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities each to his/her ability. In addition they will acquire skills, ability and competence in both mental and physical education that will equip the individual to live and contribute to the development of the community and the society at large.

The Concept of Special Education

Special education is a promise to the disabled, but a disappointment, problem, headache and a mystery to most parents who find their children/ward in need of the educational services which are different from those presented in a normal classroom setting. According to National Policy on Education (FRN, 1998), special education is the education of children and adults who have learning difficulties because of different kinds of handicaps - blindness, partial sightedness, deafness, hardness-of- hearing, mental retardation, social maladjustment, limb deformity or malformation etc due to circumstances of birth, inheritance or accident in later life. As a result of these, the children and adults affected are not able to cope with the regular school class organization and methods. Included are gifted children who find themselves insufficiently challenged by the programs of the regular, school/class organizations and methods.

However, a person is considered to be abnormal if he/she does not behave in a way majorities of others do. Although normality is a relative concept in that a person's/child's behaviour may be seen as normal or abnormal depending on the time, environment and circumstance in which the behaviour occurs.

Types of Disabilities

Learning Disabilities

These Learning Disabilities affect a person's ability to extract information or event to communicate. In fact, learning disability is the basic psychological process, imperfect ability to listen or think, read or write, spell or do mathematical calculations. It replaces their ability to remember basic facts needed to contribute learning more advanced lessons.

Polio

Polio or poliomyelitis is among the most feared and studied disease of the first century. It appears unexpectedly, striking its victims, mostly children with a frightening randomness that resulted in panic in 1940s and 1950s. Poliomyelitis normally spreads like wildfire when not checked. It is contagious, leaving its victims crippled with lifeless limb.

Mental Disorder

This may be described as an incomplete development of mind. These can be caused by drug addiction, such as tobacco, heroine, cocaine, crack, alcohol and other classes of sedatives. Mental disabilities or disorder can also generate from depression, frustration, and malformation while in the womb etc.

Arthritis

The victims of arthritis do not die like those having pneumonia, or go insane like drug addicts or like those infected with syphilis, instead it causes disabilities mostly on elderly people. In short arthritis is defined as the inflammation of a joint. (Roper, 1970).

Hearing Impairment

This is an inability of a person to hear and even speak well. This impairment can be caused by measles, and meningitis, and even the treatment of these illnesses can also cause hearing impairment. The use of chroloquine also causes hearing impairment.

Eye Impairment

The eye is the window to the body. Through the eye many systematic diseases can be diagnosed e.g. diabetes, mellitus, HIV/AIDS, ocular diseases can develop in the presence of poor hygiene, (Trachoma), malnutrition (Vitamin A deficiency), Trauma, drug abuse and systematic disease e.g. HIV/AIDS, hypertension etc. Habit like smoking can affect vision. The use of harmful traditional eye medications can damage the eyes and lead to blindness.

Obnoxious Treatment to the Disabled

The society and family regard people with disabilities as useless because they neither could nor contribute to the wealth of the family and the Nation. Some are locked up inside the rooms; some are abandoned after birth to die. While others leave them to roam the streets begging for alms.

The mentally deranged people are put in chains and caned so that the "demons can leave them". People with disabilities are ridiculed and persecuted. Even some are being impregnated by those who suppose to take care of them. For instance, a case was reported on NTA Newline programme on July 3, 2005, of a mentally deranged woman who was impregnated by her pastor.

Sometimes, the government builds a rehabilitation centre where they are institutionalized without adequate food and shelter. This inhuman attitude meted out to them usually makes them to head for streets where they beg for alms.

Effective Administrative Strategies on Special Education Planning

Planning is the determination of activity in advance and it is a decision making process which provides a basis for economic and effective action for the future. Effective planning clears the ground for integrated action. Reducing the number of unforeseen problems promotes the use of more efficient methods and provides the basis for the administrative function of control thereby assuring focus in organizational objectives.

In line with the above explanation of planning, the federal government has established a centre in Lagos where hearing impairment are dictated from babies and corrected. The incurable ones will now be sent to a special education school. The teachers provided for these special schools must be well equipped in terms of knowledge in the areas like speech-language. Pathologists, physical and occupational therapists with guidelines and strategies to better direct and manage the work of para-educators. Injecting into the special education plan is creating awareness to other students/pupils from even other schools to have positive attitudes towards students with disabilities. This can include creating opportunities for interaction between students with disabilities and students peers.

Organising

Afolayan (1981), defined organization as establishment of a role, arranging staff and resources for facilitating the accomplishment of some purpose. The government/the authority concerned should provide opportunities for collaboration or teamwork among the students provide positive self-

concepts in students, create a positive and welcome learning environment. The principals should make sure that the teachers create in students a feeling of personal value, acceptance, and competitive learning challenges. The authority/principals should create enough space in the library to enable the students to maneuver their wheelchairs. This is true as these students are trapped in between the shelves because of lack of space. This causes frustration on the part of the students since it limits them to browse without the assistance of the library staff to access materials.

Directing

The principals after planning and allocation of resources are supposed to have a sense of direction like clarifying of certain roles to members. The aim is to provide guideline to the staff for effective work in order to achieve the organizational goal, which is equipping the disabled through massive education for the growth of the nation. It is important that the principal while directing or clarifying of task should make sure that the task allocated is based on the areas of specialization.

Motivation

According to Obi (2003), motivation may be seen as a perception, methods of activities used by management for the purpose of providing a climate conducive to satisfaction of various needs of the employees. Motivation is an inducement by the principals to the staff and sometimes from the Ministries or State Commission or even private entrepreneur to the entire staff members of an organization. Motivation can come in form of increase in salary, training, bonus etc. Ezenwa (1998) and Tagore (1963), cited in Alagbu (1993), talked of retaining of teachers for effective and efficient productivity. Constant payment of salaries to members of special education staff can enhance them towards discharging their duties diligently.

Fafunwa (1983), stated that for our education to meet the National objectives, well trained, qualified, efficient, satisfy and dedicated teachers are absolutely essential. For the teacher is the spark that fixed the whole development process, the key man in the drive to progress. This training of staff in special schools will enhance their use of modern equipment provided by the government, World Health Organization (WHO), Unicef and the philanthropists.

Control

Control means adjustment of activities and relationships so as to ensure that members are in conformity with appropriate ways of achieving pre-determined objectives. In this area of special education the principal can control the conduct of his staff and students through the enforcement of rules and regulations. The principal should see that the performance is in relation with the established standard. Also the principal should make sure that all the units in the special education are working towards the organizational goals.

Management of Facilities

Management of facilities is another aspect of administration Phineze (1982), cited in Alagbu (2004) observed that all teachers, regardless of age, residence (including institutions), race, disability, ethnic or cultural background, should have a continuous access to the information and materials necessary to cope with the increasing complexity of our changing social economic and technological environment. It is the work of the principal to see that the inadequate facilities provided are well kept and where funds are made available to utilize the funds in equipping the school adequately.

Management of Funds

Effective financial management should be the goal of any organization especially in special education where scarce resources are pulling the objectives of the organization into the mud. In Nigeria for instance, the federal government has laid emphasis on education when it stated in the National Policy for education (FRN, 1998:47), "education is an expensive social service and require adequate financial provision from all tiers of government for successful implementation of the educational programmes" This policy of the federal government need to be effectively implemented; to prevent disabled children from roaming the streets in search of means of survival.

Poor management of these meager funds, which are provided for special education, causes a lot of problem. According to Baron (1979), cited in Alagbu (2004), stated that efficiency and

Accountability are basic essentials for achieving effective financial management and productivity in our special education schools.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Hospitals should have clinics attached to them for newly born babies for early identification of abnormalities; this is for early curative measures and medical care before they reach the age of primary schools. Also these disabilities must not be neglected for it is important to detect these abnormalities and begin to work with them early in their educational experiences.

Vocational centers should also be opened for these handicapped children who cannot do formal education and job opportunities should be created for them after graduation. Those who are not absorbed into commerce and industry, but possess artistic ability, should be given centers where these arts created by them will be exhibited.

Federal, State and Individual who embark on construction of roads, bridges, building of offices and residential houses should take cognizance of the handicap children and create ways for them to move in and out without aid.

Special education in the 21st century, has suffered a lot of set back because of neglect and inadequate facilities provided at various centers both by the government, private organisation and institutions. Even where these meagre pieces of equipment are provided, especially in government owned schools, they are not well managed, because often there are no specialists to man the pieces of equipment provided.

Awareness in our schools should be created to avoid increase in disabilities like the use of harmful traditional eye medication which damages the eyes, smoking by pupils which causes cancer, brain tumor madness and impairment of the eyes; non-inoculation of children which causes philomyelitis etc.

The ones, which are already, affected by these diseases should be shown empathy and not sympathy and if possible removed from the streets and taken to well organize schools. These special schools should be well funded, equipped and managed by the government for efficient and effective growth of the nation.

Nevertheless, there is ability in disability if well harness through special education as this will rid our streets of beggars.

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